

spare **Rib**

March no.44 30p

**SHORT STORY:
"NIGHTS"**

SEXUAL SELF HELP

INSIDE AN INDIAN PRISON

**PAGE 17
PHOTO NEWS-
EQUAL PAY AND
THE CRISIS**

THE SADISTA SISTERS

THEIR NEW ALBUM IS ON THE STREETS-NOW!

"A mixture of raunchy rock music and sexy cabaret"
Titbits

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Sunday Mirror

"Crude"
Evening News

"They can't sing"
The Guardian

"Britain's most
outrageous female
group"
Daily Mail

"Shocking, most
provocative"
Daily Mail

TRA 313

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Person
ARE YOU MAN ENOUGH?

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Spare Rib is produced collectively by Rose Ades, Alison Fell, Victoria Green, Sue Hobbs, Wisty Hoyland, Susan Lambert, Laura Margolis, Jill Nicholls, Rosie Parker, Linda Phillips, Jane Prince, Marsha Rowe, Ann Scott, Eleanor Stephens.

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WOMEN'S LIBERATION IS NOT REDUNDANT

SINCE the Sex Discrimination and Equal Pay Acts became law on December 29 many confused and confusing ideas have been put about concerning women's new status. To counter press shouts of "You are equal now, so stop complaining" we should examine these Acts in the light of women's day to day work and family lives.

Taking the Equal Pay Act first, women who do the "same or broadly similar work" as men, for the same employer (firm or group of companies) are now entitled to equal pay. But the vast majority of women work in industries or in jobs where women predominate and where they are below men in pay and in status. It is possible to compare the value of different jobs through Job Evaluation Schemes, but these were originally set up by management to rationalise and regiment the work force. Under any scheme designed to value work according to skill or responsibility much of women's work would not be regraded. Women's skills are mainly learnt pre-employment, at home — cleaning, caring, smiling and supporting; or they are limited and without prospects, learnt at school — typing or on the job. Even at the professional level women are concentrated in the service industries and in a supporting role within these industries — teachers, nurses, publicists. And this concentration has been getting worse, despite the notoriety of the exceptions.

In addition to their paid work, women have their work at home: 62% of women workers are married, and many single women have family commitments. Recent cuts in public spending on social services are increasing the burden on women who must provide these services — caring for the young, the old and the handicapped — individually. Cuts in school meals have forced women to give up their jobs (so as to be home to cook the lunch); cuts in nursery provision have prevented women from starting jobs.

The Protective Laws, originally drawn up to protect women as child bearers, to prevent them (and young people) from doing shift work, including night work, and excessive overtime in most factories, are also threatened. Under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 these laws can be repealed without any further debate in Parliament, even though rotating shifts are bad for the health — everybody's health, and night work is socially and sexually disruptive.

In general the law (discussed on page 33) does now prohibit discrimination against women who are as free as men to take up such opportunities as are open in a time of rising unemployment. It also encourages women's aspirations and raises our expectations. Increasingly women have had their children before they are thirty, and by thirty-five have no children under school age. But with twenty-five years of working life ahead of them, married women can not join the economic rat race on an equal basis with men. The state itself reinforces their dependence on their husbands. The family is the key unit in welfare and tax legislation; and the family is defined as a breadwinner and his dependents.

It's nearly one hundred years since the TUC made equal pay official policy. Under pressure from women's organisations and women in the trade union and labour movements both major political parties have now grabbed at some idea of justice for women as a vote catcher, while selling it to employers as economic good sense.

And so it's not for nothing that we, in our fight for women's liberation, group around six demands, and not one demand for economic equality, which together are the preconditions for women's liberation — equal pay; equal education and job opportunities; free 24 hour childcare; free contraception and abortion on demand; legal and financial independence for all women; an end to discrimination against lesbians and the right of women to a self-defined sexuality.

Really freeing women means challenging the sexual division of labour, and the division between home and work — a complete restructuring of society. We need to take the emotions of warmth, care and involvement, now warped and confined in the family, into the rest of our lives. A long struggle which, while including legislative reforms, goes far beyond them. □

Rose Ades

9
NEWBURGH
STREET
LONDON
W1A
4XS

* indicates letters have been cut.

Financing our Production

Dear Sisters,
By now we expect that some of your readers will have written to ask about the adverts carried on the cover of *Spare Rib* 42; and we are wondering if you have it in mind to find another way of financing production because we find it very disappointing that *Spare Rib*, as a radical women's magazine amongst all the shit on the news-stands, should display such incredibly sexist and offensive images.

We hope you have some luck in finding an alternative although we think it must be really hard to find a better way to cover the main costs – but surely the record companies are putting out other records you can advertise. Perhaps they gave you these two because they are women artists. It's ironic that the women in question should be so reactionary and misguided. In struggle and love
Rising Free Collective
London WC1

We thank Rising Free for their letter. We know that the radical content of the magazine is sometimes contradicted by the space which we sell to advertisers, though we do try to get adverts which will be of some interest and use to our readers. As a collective we constantly discuss the contradictions that arise in our struggle to keep Spare Rib available to all women through news-stand distribution – advertising is one of these.

Sorry – 2 Publishers Not 1

Dear *Spare Rib*,
We are sorry that our book *All Work and No Pay: Women, Housework and the Wages Due* merited only one paragraph's notice in your magazine (*Spare Rib* 42). It has been usual in the past for you to review books from the women's movement more fully. But even though you were unable to give it more space, we feel that you should have mentioned both publishers, and given their addresses.

The book was published jointly by Power of Women Collective, 129 Drummond Street, London NW1, and Falling Wall Press, 79 Richmond Road, Montpelier, Bristol BS6 5EP. Anyone wanting to order a copy of the book from either of the publishers should send 70p plus 18p for post and packing. The book is also available from bookshops.
Suzie Fleming
for Power of Women Collective and Falling Wall Press

These are some of the many letters received in response to 'The Moon Within Your Reach – a feminist guide to female orgasm' (Spare Rib 42). In this issue (page 46) Eleanor Stephens gives more practical information.

Feminist Mind – Victorian Body

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I read your article 'The Moon Within Your Reach' with great interest as I suffer from the problem, and there seems to be no practical help to be found in London. I have learned to get some sensation from masturbation; I don't know whether it is orgasm or not. I can't transfer it to a situation with another person, contrary to what Eleanor Stephens' article suggests.

I sometimes think the so-called Sexual Revolution is tolerated only because many people can't benefit from it anyway, being sexually and emotionally dysfunctional. People tell me how relaxed sexually we have become but I don't know anybody who can discuss sex in a 'serious and open way'. I am taking a teacher's training course and we managed to tiptoe through a discussion of adolescent development without so much as mentioning or referring to sex.

I find that this sexual dysfunction problem permeates my whole life. It makes me live in a way I don't choose; though my mind is feminist, my body is Victorian. I am forced to be a 'good girl' whether I like it or not.

I would be most interested in the type of group described in the article, and hope that something could be started.

Yours
B.L.
London NW1

The Lesbian and Orgasm

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I read the article on a feminist approach to female orgasm and found it very valuable reading. As I'm a lesbian I was particularly interested in what was written about the lesbian and orgasm. I think it is about time that the myth of the lesbian being a terrific lover was exposed. I'm a lesbian and I don't see myself in any way as a terrific lover. It's been a hindrance, starting a relationship with a woman who is not a lesbian yet (in a practical way sexually). It can and has made me quite insecure about love making because I felt something extra special had been expected of me (and has I think).

I'm 35, I've had a seven-year relationship with one woman which was mostly an emotional relationship because we could not get it together on equal terms sexually. At 35 I was until very recently unable to let anyone touch me, because I had all kinds of fears of how let down the other

woman would feel if I didn't have an orgasm, and I was more than confident that I wouldn't. The only way I have been able to have an orgasm is giving myself one. The first woman I have ever let touch me (I suppose because I had reached a time in my life when I knew I couldn't let this state of affairs go on any longer the way it was) not surprisingly did not result in me having an orgasm. She is now in another country and I am still faced with this problem. I think the idea of a clinic for all women, and, of course, lesbians is an absolute must. There are women who get through life resolving their problems alone or with friends, but others may be more shy, less friends, maybe their personality, just can't resolve their sexual difficulties this way. Who's starting a clinic, where, and when? I think that says all I need to say.

For the first time ever I want to sign myself anonymously.
Letters marked 'Lesbian and Orgasm' will be forwarded confidentially.

Preoccupation with Orgasm

Dear Comrades,
Sue Tyrrell's article 'Peroxide Politics and the Counter Revolution' (*Spare Rib* 42) was one of the best I have ever read in *Spare Rib*, and I must say, with due respect, I feel it is far more relevant to women's liberation than your seemingly endless preoccupation with orgasm and how females can achieve it. Don't get me wrong – none of us will deny that sex is a pleasurable and important part of living. But surely, in the present chaotic conditions throughout the capitalist world, political awareness must be given first priority?

And it is in this context that I come to the second item in the same issue that gave me real hope for the future. I refer to the letter from Barbara, aged 17. The more young people who read *Spare Rib* and other progressive literature, the better. Such literature can only enhance their political consciousness, without which the drastic action necessary to do away with a just social order for the working masses can never be successfully achieved.

Yours in sisterhood
Myra Childs
London SE1

"Keep banging away dear"

* Dear All,
I have been receiving "psycho-sexual" counselling through an advisory clinic. My doctor's techniques of interpretation are Freudian and therefore, unfortunately, male predominated – penis/vaginal orgasm which she believes to be deeply fulfilling and satisfying. It was when I read your article, which is a real eye opener, that I realised what she was "advising" me. When I told her about your article she reacted on the defensive – her wall crumbled, she ignored a lot of the things I was saying about it, more or less patted me on the head and said "keep banging away dear, it'll come in time". (Years, she said.) I'm not going back again. So now I'm stuck. With my particular problem I have found London unable to help me. I've tried virtually everywhere and can only now think of hypnosis!! (Meanwhile I'm banging away – just in case!) So for me, at any rate, to set up groups similar to that in Berkeley would be an answer to my prayer.

More power to yer elbows in '76.

R.M.
London SW4

Can I Learn to Ride a Bicycle?

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I have just been alarmed to read your article on a feminist approach to orgasms. In large letters on the first page are the words 'Anyone who can learn to ride a bicycle can learn to have an orgasm'. Surely this must be disturbing to those sisters who like myself have been so exaggeratedly socialised into the feminine role that we cannot do anything mechanical. Ever since a May morning in 1956 when, having never mastered the technique of bringing my bike to a halt, I mowed down a complete formation of Morris dancers in the Broad (Oxford), I have kept well clear of anything with two wheels. I have subsequently failed my driving test eight times. What is the connection of this to my sexual potential, since I am not in fact frigid? Does it mean that anyone who can have an orgasm can learn to ride a bicycle?

I'm sorry but I'm feeling really confused.

In sisterhood
Elizabeth Wilson
London N7



SHORTLIST

Please send information to Jill Nicholls, Shortlist, Spare Rib, 9 Newburgh St, London W1A 4XS.

events

Events are listed chronologically.

Liverpool NAC Demo

Liverpool Council has banned NAC from demonstrating publicly in some parts of Liverpool. In response there's a demonstration planned for February 21. Details from the Women's Centre, 49 Seel St, Liverpool 1 (051-709411).

A Woman's Right to Work

Meeting organised by the newly-formed Hounslow Women's Action Group. It's on *A Woman's Right to Work*, with a speaker from the Working Women's Charter Campaign. On February 26 at 8pm. At the Labour Club, 20 Heath Rd, Hounslow, Middlesex.

Social Security

Hilary Land, lecturer in Social Administration at Bristol University, is talking about *Women and Social Security* on February 27 at 7.30pm at the Women's Research and Resources Centre, 158 N. Gower St, London NW1.

Fighting the Cuts

Conference called by the Working Women's Charter Campaign on the cuts in public spending, which are hitting women particularly hard. In London on February 28. Contact Women and the Cuts, c/o Michele Ryan, 39 Parkholme Rd, London E8 (01-249 3072) for details.

Lesbian Conference

The third national lesbian conference is on February 28/9 at the Moulin Rouge, Worrall Rd, Clifton, Bristol. Registration £2.50 includes accommodation and food.

The programme includes "Did Queen Victoria exist or was she a male fantasy?" (with a short march to her statue), elementary self-defence sessions, car and cycle maintenance, films, a gay women's theatre group and a football match.

Workshops include: bisexuality, sexuality, lesbian mothers, lesbian art and culture, lesbianism and Wages for Housework, lesbian teachers, abortion and role-playing. Other suggestions to the Lesbian Conference Collective, c/o The Women's Centre, 59 Lower Union St, Bristol 1 (0272-712 621).

Adventure Playgrounds

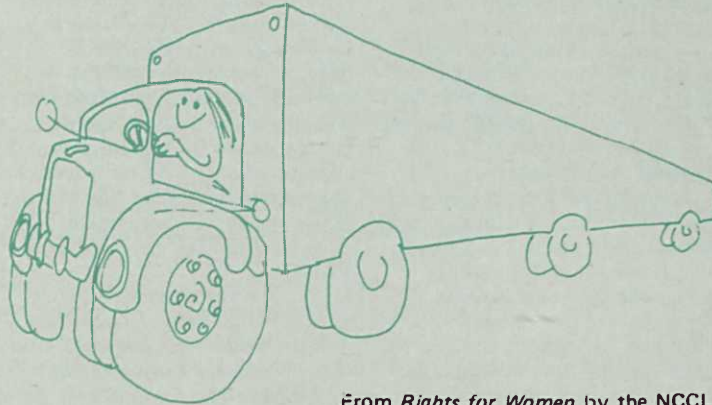
Women working on adventure playgrounds have started meeting once a month to discuss their work - why few girls come to playgrounds, how to handle violence, etc. The next meeting starts at 10.30am on March 2 in the Women's Liberation Workshop, 38 Earham St, London WC2 (01-836 6081).

International Tribunal

The international Tribunal of Crimes against Women will be held in Brussels on March 4-8

"a global speak-out on the many crimes committed against women".

Legal and financial dependence, battered women and restrictions on abortion are the crimes chosen for Britain. If you want to contribute in these areas, contact National Women's Aid Federation, 51 Chalcot Rd, Lon-



From *Rights for Women* by the NCCL

don NW1; Legal and Financial Dependence Campaign, 7 Killieser Ave, London SW2; National Abortion Campaign, 30 Camden Rd, London NW1.

Other ideas, money, etc., to ITCAW c/o Catherine Livingstone, 17a Harrington Rd, Brighton, Sussex.

Emancipation to Liberation

Half-day school on *Woman: From Emancipation to Liberation*. Lectures and discussion on the 19th century movement for women's emancipation and on the contemporary women's liberation movement. At Vaughan College, St Nicholas Circle, Leicester LE1 4LB on March 6, 2.30-6. Organised by the Workers' Educational Association and the University of Leicester. Tutor: Ms Josephine V. Clark. Registration 70p, or 50p for OAPs and students. To reserve a place contact Mr F T Watson, WEA Secretary, Vaughan College.

International Women's Day

There'll be a march to celebrate in London on March 6. Contact the Women's Liberation Workshop, 01-836 6081, for details of time and route.

Woman Help Yourself

Weekend workshop organised by Greenwich women's liberation group to explore alternative health, our self-image, child-bearing, sexuality. Also films, and a creche (run by men). At Kidbrooke House, Mycenae Rd, London SE3. Starting March 19 at 8pm. Details and registration from Rosie Brennan, 167 Herbert Rd, London SE18 (01-854 8636).

South West Region

The S.W. Regional Women's Liberation Conference is on March 20 at the Friends' Meeting House, Hampton Rd, Bristol 6. Registration and coffee 9.30, conference 10-5. Creche and accommodation

available. Suggestions for workshops and numbers needing the creche to the Women's Centre, 59 Lower Union St, Bristol BS1 2DU (Bristol 22760).

Women at Work in Wales

Conference on March 20 in the Great Hall (UWIST), Cardiff.

Speakers include Dr Sheila Abdullah and Dr Oonagh Hartnett. Chaired by Ann Clwyd. Sponsored by the Wales TUC. Tickets available from Gill Boden, 41 Conway Rd, Cardiff for £1.50. Contact 022-28908, office hours.

ALRA Bazaar

A Woman's Right to Choose/ALRA are holding a fund-raising bazaar on March 20 from 10am in Hampstead Town Hall, London NW3. Helpers, contributors, jumble and crafts are urgently needed. Contact 88a Islington High St, London N1 (01-359 5209).

National NAC Demo

Demonstrate against all Parliamentary moves to restrict women's access to safe, legal abortion. In London on April 3. Details from NAC, 30 Camden Rd, London N1 (01-485 4303).

campaigns

Working Women's Charter

WWCC have produced a lot of publicity material for use at meetings. A poster, 22"x17", 8p, called *Women's Year, Man's World*, has sections on the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts, and the difference between the WWC and the TUC's Twelve Aims for Women at Work.

An informative booklet *What's It All About?*, 5p, gives the Charter, its history, progress and ideas on how to promote it in your area.

There are lists of supporting organisations at 2p, lists of charter groups at 2p, speakers' notes at 10p, and the bi-monthly newsletter at 15p (annual sub £1.50). Also badges 2" across with the words 'Working Women's Charter' surrounding a fist in a women's sign, red on white, at 15p; and

short-sleeved tee-shirts in several colours with WWC across the front in black, at £1.50.

All orders to WWCC, 49 Lower Hill, London SE23 1PZ. Cheques payable to Working Women's Charter (please include approx. postage).

Gay Liberation

Best gay badge since Gays Against Fascism - "Gay Love It's the real thing". Designed like the Coca Cola ads, white on red. 20p plus 10p postage from *Gay News* Mail Order, 1a Normand Gdns, Greyhound Rd, London W14 9SB.

Abortion

A Woman's Right to Choose have produced a pamphlet called *Campaigning for better abortion facilities in your area*. It suggests we now fight for outpatient abortion facilities. If there were better NHS facilities for women wanting abortions, SPUC arguments about profiteering and late abortions would be shaken. The specific local campaign could revitalise NAC groups and win more local support.

The pamphlet explains how daycare abortion works and how to lobby health authorities. Includes a reading list on abortion services and addresses of Regional Health Authorities. 21pp, 25p incl. postage from A Woman's Right to Choose, 88a Islington High St, London N1 8EG.

services

Women's Release

Release is extending its legal and welfare services to include women's rights and resources. Women can come to Release for information and advice, and if necessary be referred to reliable solicitors.

Release also does pregnancy counselling and gives help with abortion, contraception and sterilization. They'd like information on doctors throughout the country who are sympathetic to women patients wishing to discuss abortion.

They hope for further contact with women solicitors and doctors, and other groups and organisations working on women's issues. Release is open 10 - 6 on weekdays, extended to 10 pm Mondays and Thursdays when a doctor and solicitor are present for consultation. Contact Release, 1 Elgin Ave, London W9 (01-289 1123 or emergency number outside office hours 01-603 8654).

centres

Birmingham

Women in Birmingham are trying to get a house in Brighton Road, Balsall Heath to use as an organisational centre. It could also be a meeting place for groups and provide facilities for producing the newsletter, making posters and doing pregnancy testing.

The centre will be open daily, run by a rota of volunteers. It needs money - contributions to Sue Simpson, 79 Blenheim Rd,

B'ham 13 – and help – if you have time to work on the rota, contact Sophie Laws, B'ham 449 7199.

arts

Arts Awards

People living in the Greater London Area and working in any visual media (photographers, performance artists, etc.) can apply now for a Greater London Arts Association award.

The Association is offering £6,000 in awards of £250 and £500 to enable people to set aside time for work and/or to purchase materials. There are also some awards for critics and researchers. The GLAA visual arts panel will do the selecting, visiting people to see and talk about their work.

If you need the money, apply – arts grants usually go only to people in the know. Full details and application forms from Visual Arts Officer, GLAA, 25/31 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9SG.

Hackney Flashers

The Hackney Flashers Collective have reproduced some of the photos in their Women at Work exhibition (reviewed in *Spare Rib* 42) as postcards. 40p incl. postage for a set of 6 from the Photography Workshop, 152 Upper St, London N1 or singly at 6p from Centreprise, 34 Dalston Lane, London E8. A slideshow of the exhibition can be hired for £2 from the Photography Workshop address.



One of six postcards showing women at work, produced by the Hackney Flashers Collective

pamphlets

Immigrants and Employment in the Clothing Industry: The Rag Trade in London's East End

A report by Samir Shah, published by the Runnymede Trust and available from them at Stuart House, 1 Tudor St, London EC4 for £1.30.

Yet another study on the hidden homeworkers, but this one fulfills a real need in that it begins the process of examining conditions as they affect immigrants,

mainly Asians, in London's East End rag trade. I say begins because the report does not go into their particular cultural background enough, saying "it is neither possible nor relevant to expand on the reasons . . ."

The situation is examined as it affects both immigrant men and women who, through hard necessity, have little other choice of work. But it also shows that while the women machine and sew, the men manage and develop the business side: a repeat of the economic world outside. A statistical breakdown of the division of labour and jobs would be useful here rather than just the numbers interviewed.

However, the report is excellent in showing why homeworking has become so profitable for employers since the war. It also discusses the growth of group homeworking as part of the extended family-and-friends system of the Asians, and how such centres, run on cooperative lines, might be used to ease the isolation of the homeworker. Though the report is helpful on immigrant working conditions, it fails to understand the double exploitation of women. (Mary Kennedy)

Women in the Spanish Revolution

Liz Willis looks at the role of women in the Spanish revolution of 1936 from a libertarian point of view. She aims to rescue the history of women "not only from obscurity, but from the patronising line about women doing a grand job, being one hundred per cent behind the men (where else?), and from the counter-tendency, which occasionally comes over in women's liberation writings, to regard everything done by women as good and beautiful by definition."

Solidarity Pamphlet No.48, 18pp, 10p plus some postage from Solidarity, 123 Lathom Rd, London E6.

Radical America

The November/December issue of *Radical America* (vol 9, no 6) contains a translation of a Portuguese document "Women in the Portuguese Class Struggle", and an analysis of the US Conference of Labor Union Women – an organised expression of women's liberation within the trade union movement.

Available for 50p from Colletts, London and from *Radical America*, PO Box B, N Cambridge, Mass. 02140, USA.

Rights for Women

A readable, step by step guide (95pp, 65p) prepared by the NCCL to help us find our way around the new legislation – Equal Pay, Sex Discrimination, Employment Protection. It explains the role of the Equal Opportunities Commission, points out loopholes in the acts and suggests changes (for more on this, see pp 33/4). If you want to prepare a case, or have queries, contact the NCCL first – 186 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1 (01-278 4575).

NUJ: Images of Women

Guidelines for promoting equality through journalism, drawn up by the Equality Working Party of the NUJ. Aimed at journalists, but interesting for everyone. 15p (or 20p incl. postage) from NUJ, Acorn House, 314/320 Gray's Inn Rd, London WC1X 8DP.



From *Images of Women* by the NUJ Equality Working Party

Squatters' Handbook

The new edition now out updates the legal section and includes information on roof repairs and services – gas, water and electricity. Suggests how to find and get into your house. 30pp, 10p plus 6½p postage from 2 St Pauls Rd, London N1 (01-359 8814).

Sexual Politics

A Basic Reading List

This list, compiled by Librarians for Social Change and aimed mainly at teachers and librarians, is by no means comprehensive, but useful. It covers women's liberation, gay liberation, women's fiction, male gay literature, sex education and children's books. Available from Release, 1 Elgin Ave, London W9 at 20p (30p by post).

Cutting the Welfare State (Who Profits)

This report is the first of a series investigating the economic crisis facing "Great Britain Ltd". Why is the government cutting public spending? where will the cuts fall, and why?

Hospitals, houses and schools are axed, while more and more money goes in aid to industry, defence, repaying loans at enormous interest rates, enforcing Law and Order.

Excellent on capital and the state, but perhaps too pessimistic about the level of resistance.

Published jointly by Counter Information Services and Community Development Project. 39pp, 45p + 15p p&p from CIS, 9 Poland St, London W1.

Humpty Dumpty

Humpty Dumpty, an excellent publication about psychology and psychiatry, is planning a special women's issue. Contributions needed now on any subject relating to women and psychology. Contact 28 Redbourne Rd, London N3.

Images of Women Newsletter

This contains valuable information on groups working on images of women, addresses for obtaining materials and lists of courses, pamphlets and journals. The

Women Artists' Collective outlines its ideas for a women's cultural centre.

Through the newsletter women working in similar areas can contact one another and pool resources. The copy date for the next issue is the end of March.

12p incl. postage from Angela

Martin c/o 62 Dean St, London W1 or 8p if collected from the Women's Liberation Workshop. 38 Earlham St, London WC2.

Man's World, Women's Work

This pamphlet, put out by Christian Aid, is mainly for use in secondary schools. It has photographs, facts and questions about women's work in Asia, Africa and Latin America as compared to Britain. Not much about the men who own the world, but good on the work that women have to do in it: cooks, farmers and child-minders everywhere, masons in Syria, miners in Latin America, earth-movers in Malaysia. In Lesotho women construct 98% of the roads.

Available for 10p plus 6½p postage from Christian Aid, PO Box No.1, London SW1W 9BW.

plays

Foco Novo

A theatre show with music – *The Nine Days and the Saltley Gates* – tells the story of the women and men who struggled through two great strikes, 1926 and 1972. Staged by Foco Novo at the Oval House Theatre, 54 Kennington Oval, London SE11 on February 18–22 and 25–29 at 7.30. Contact Foco Novo on 01-735 2786.

Work to Role

This very funny new play by the Women's Theatre Group looks at the work women do. We're reviewing it next issue. On tour now round Greater London schools, youth clubs, women's centres, student unions, union meetings. Contact Anne Engel, 22a Grosvenor Ave, London N5 (01-226 4243).



Men with a 'Stable of Starlets'

Dear *Spare Rib*,
Nicki Brading's experiences when she stayed at a hotel with her black lover (*Spare Rib* 41) are disturbing, but they are nothing new. That this happened in Huntingdon is interesting, though, for it is quite a while since I was last thrown out of any hotel while engaged in taping interviews with visiting black musicians in their London bedrooms. Such reactions to black man/white woman are still commonplace here as elsewhere, and will probably continue to be until we have a black-controlled body to deal with racial discrimination rather than the ineffective Race Relations Board, set up by the government and devoted towards maintaining the status quo and, frankly, racist itself.

But if Ms Brading's experience made her bitter, what does she imagine her black sister – and brother – have to face every day? Aside from the discrimination she encounters at all levels, the black woman living here can expect to be ignored if she is quiet and passive. If she is a so-called 'intellectual', she is, as Buchi Emecheta pointed out in the same issue, protected and patronised. (I know several white men with a 'stable' of such intellectual 'starlets' whom they trot out at intervals, treating them like fragile dolls, this in itself a form of racism – after all, it has been quite a while since they treated their own women in this way.) Thirdly, if the woman is militant and aggressive, she can expect constant abuse for her efforts, while physical violence is not a rare price to pay for speaking her mind.

Racism is a fact of life for all blacks in this and other countries where whites are in the majority. Thus, Amrit Wilson's Editorial (same issue again) was especially welcome for clarifying the condition of black women living here. She also made an excellent point regarding the attitudes held by some of my so-called liberated sisters.

In my experience, black women do not need whites to make them aware of the oppression that exists for them within their own community, but they have something more pressing to deal with first. Only when some steps have been made towards racial equality will black women have the energy to devote towards bettering their own position.

Amrit Wilson mentions white women's comments on male chauvinism in black communities.

Although she is writing primarily about the Asian situation, it is this attitude amongst feminists that causes them to overlook and ignore the continuing presence of racism. I do not for one minute support this chauvinism that undoubtedly exists, but I understand the reason for it amongst ex-slaves where the male has never been on an equal footing with the ex-master. (Again, I am not referring to the Asian situation.)

Amongst politically-aware American blacks, for example, it is considered necessary for the woman to step down from the privileged position she has occupied in white society in the eyes of black men, and to support the man in his fight for equality. To feminists, this may seem to be taking a step backwards, yet it is, as far as the majority are concerned, the prevailing attitude. In the main, Afro-Americans of both sexes have little respect or regard for the women's movement and while we may not like this, the fact of it cannot be denied. Many blacks see the movement as yet another white-designed means of dividing them and sapping their energy. (It is not only Tammy Wynette who sings of standing by her man, incidentally; check out the lyrics of some black writers.) Some militants dislike the women's movement for annexing their tactics and strategy and converting their slogans and rhetoric to feminist use, while there are many who continue to believe that birth control is a form of genocide. Having seen what goes down in the day-to-day life of blacks both here and in America, frankly I don't blame them.

Sisterhood is beautiful and powerful, too – we know that – but to my mind, whites have no place in the black struggle against oppression other than to support it and publicise prevailing conditions. And as a journalist and photographer, that is what I try to do at every opportunity. In sisterhood,
Valerie Wilmer
London SW12

Centrally Heated Place?

Dear *Spare Rib*,
At the National Abortion Campaign Rally in Trafalgar Square, November 22, I was amongst the women and men giving mutual support in our struggle for the freedom to choose. The meeting attracted sympathisers and the general notice of anyone passing through Trafalgar Square. But at collection time, the appeal for funds began with the "need to have an indoor, centrally heated place where we can all meet in warmth and comfort next time". Is that really how our money should be spent? If we shut ourselves away from the public we won't be gaining peripheral and potential support, or attention – and aren't we used to working in bad conditions anyway? For once, we can do so as a choice: until we can afford to sit in easy comfort, let's keep our priorities right and spend our finances on the important action: publicity, organisation, political and legal action.

I look forward to the next rally – armed with our coats and our conviction – in Trafalgar Square.
Susanna Beswick
London N1

Apology to All Lesbians

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I wish to make a public apology to all lesbians, women artists, and members of the women's movement, for having painted the pictures for the BBC Play for Today 'The Other Woman' (9.30 pm, January 6).

I am a single mother and painter and was at the time very much in debt. I was given to understand that the dreadful mediocore script would be modified in such a way as to make it more sympathetic and believable in connection with lesbianism and women in the visual arts. I tried tactfully to offer my advice on such matters as the relationships in the play (totally unrealistic), the bigot's fantasy of lesbian rape (physically impossible and there is no need for it) and comic inaccuracies about pot smoking (like early American anti-marijuana propaganda). I believe Jane Lapotaire played her part to the best of her ability despite the awful script, bigoted direction and editing by the BBC back room boys.

It was obvious that the play was manipulated by people who whether they realise it or not are totally insensitive and ignorant about, and feel threatened by lesbianism. It is interesting that homosexuality is now being treated fairly sympathetically on the TV, but this play is a retrograde piece of publicity for all lesbians, especially those involved in custody cases.

Women in the visual arts have to cope with a tremendous amount of subtle discrimination, destructiveness – both physical or in the form of negative criticism and isolation. The play completely victimises the female artist.

The best half of my work was not shown. The BBC obviously over-estimates the insensitivity and mediocrity of the audience.

But equally I hate to think that I betrayed my fellow women by having any of my work seen at all on TV in connection with such a play.

Yours sincerely
Catherine Nicholson
London SE4

"Too Busy to Ask Themselves"

*Dear *Spare Rib*,
I have just finished reading a Doris Lessing novel – *The Summer Before the Dark*; my response was one of satisfaction of the kind that arises when one reads something that 'says its all'.

I think *Spare Rib* readers would find of particular interest in the above novel Kate's experiment with the men on the building site who whistle at her when she arranges her clothes in a certain way but ignore her when she walks by having made a 'small transformation' to her dress.

I was especially impressed by

the following lines; the marriage referred to is that of the 'heroine' Kate and her husband Michael. "This was a happy and satisfactory marriage because both she and Michael had understood, and very early on, that the core of discontent, or of hunger, if you like, which is unfailingly part of every modern marriage – of everything, and that is the point – had nothing to do with either partner. Or with marriage. It was fed and heightened by what people were educated to expect of marriage, which was a very great deal because the texture of ordinary life (surely that was a new phrase? It had supplanted an older one? What had they used to say – that life was a vale of tears?) was thin and unsatisfactory. Marriage had had a load heaped on it which it could not sustain . . . it was not long after marriage, to the credit of them both, that they had agreed not to blame each other for not filling the deep hungers. What, then, did they hunger for? They did not know; they were always too busy to ask themselves."

Doris Lessing is full of common-sense and understanding of the limitations and paradoxical impulses of human beings and I urge any *Spare Rib* reader who has not yet read any of her novels to try them.

Sincerely
Denise Allen
Manchester 16

Insurance? Find Right Advice

Dear *Spare Rib*,
I refer to Nancy Jones' letter in *Spare Rib* 42. It appears from her description that her Commercial Union policy was written under the Married Women's Property Act for the benefit of her children. In these circumstances it is normally advisable to name two or more trustees (usually husband and wife) who would administer the money in the event of a death claim. When she decided to cash the policy, the signature of her co-trustee was needed as a matter of course. It would have been therefore more relevant to Ms Jones' requirements had some other relative been the other trustee. This is perfectly possible to arrange.

I cannot emphasise more strongly that it is best to discuss this type of policy (or any other for that matter) with a reputable insurance broker, who will consider your personal requirements both in the way a policy is written and in the choice of company.

Please do not take Ms Jones' problem as a discouragement to insure – far too many women still regard life insurance as 'man's business', and in these days this is just not true.

Yours sincerely
Sue Makin
Insurance Dept of NUS
Oxford

NIGHTS

North London 1975

I save my sleeps for when Bill comes. The rest of the time I get along by way of small strategies not very different from those used by other women I know who spend nights alone. I read a lot, new and old books written by women, novels and autobiographies mainly. Not much theory — I read more theory when I always slept with Bill. Male novelists don't do, either, they're too grand, too self-destructive, and I don't like the way they're always talking about being alone, that complacency, there's something deceitful about it.

Those nights when I know I have to be up early the next day to take the three children to their two schools, like tonight, or when I have to catch the bus to work — those are the worst. I rarely get to sleep before three. So the exhaustion builds throughout the week, and I let it all out on the nights Bill stays, clinging to him like a fretful child. (The two boys huddle and cuddle together every night, demanding nothing of their parents and everything of each other. If one wakes to go for a piss, we'll hear the other cry out plaintively for him; the little girl wakes and goes to her mother's bed promptly every 2am.) And it darkens early now, since the clocks went back; November shows in the way the lime trees which shield my window from craning passers-by lost all their golden leaves in the wind today.

I need light now. Blackness appalls me. Bill fought me for a year or more before he could accept this. One weekend we borrowed a car and drove to the coast and decided to stay overnight at Jean's mother's cottage. It was a cold night after a glaring June day, colder still inside the partly-used cottage, in that clean, neat, bed-and-breakfast bleakness where all ashtrays, occasional rugs, electric fires and other homely necessities are battened away in cupboards. I was already worrying about the light well before bedtime and by the time we eased ourselves between the chilly sheets I was panicking; I foresaw conflict about the light and I foresaw conflict about fucking. No good leaving the landing light on and the bedroom door ajar — Jean's mother would stumble out of bed and turn it off; I never could face the prospect of irritated condemnation from the host in

a strange house — I'd spend long minutes working out how to use a facecloth or a toothbrush so that it looked as if they hadn't been wetted and as if I'd brought my own as I imagined proper guests did; and Jean's mother was a nervous, fussy woman.

So we lay there in the glare of the bedside lamp, staring at this and that, at the brown shutters, the anaglypta wallpaper, the black night, the pear tree branch at the window.

"I can't sleep with the light on." Bill's voice was flat, hating.

"I can't sleep with the light off."

"I can't bear this."

"Christ."

"You know I can't sleep with the light on."

I could sense Bill's disbelief and hysteria mounting. I am very afraid of his rages, but I would not give in.

"Why not?"

I started being afraid of men's rage years ago when I slapped my husband, half-joking, and he floored me with one deadly serious blow.

"Why not?"

"Jesus if people were meant to sleep with the light on there'd be *no night, would there!*"

"Fucking *what?* Fucking *what?* You'd even bring *God* into it? What an unscrupulous pig!"

Bill gave a hopeless roar and turned away, sobbing slightly. I lay there in the first stage of tears and wavering and want. I stared at the lamp. The fine point of black rage in the middle of my misery only coalesced when an idea came.

"Bastard."

I jumped up, bouncing the bed as much as possible.

"You won't give in, will you, you won't budge. Look here," I spat, "Look at this." I thrust the bedside lamp under its little table; the embroidered runner hung down in front and the whole room dimmed to an acceptable level.

"You just wouldn't put an *ounce* of creative effort in, would you. You just refused to accept it as a *problem* to *solve*." It was so undeniable that although Bill lay there silently for some time with his sullen face saying no no, in the end he couldn't deny it.

Soon after this skirmish he started to keep a small store of candles in his house for my visits.

by
Alison Fell

Collages by E. MacFarish

Perthshire 1950

I was the youngest so I had no choice, they put me in the worst bedroom. Sleeping spiders and the bodies of their flies lurked in the crack where the oily brown wood-panelled walls met the panelling of the ceiling, and the three pines which swayed on a shelf of hill behind my window creaked in each north-east wind which swept down from the moor.

I asked for a nightlight but my father humphed and told me to use my common sense and look at what the walls were made of, and the granary was next door. The Elsan was in the grain-shaft; since my parents and my sister would have had to walk through my room to get to it they kept pots under their beds — so I was the only one who had to use it during the night. That time, I would gladly have been disturbed, I wanted my father's shadowy bulk in its short vest to pad through the room, I would even have welcomed my sister.

I clung on to the walls of the grain-shaft as I sat on the Elsan — two rough planks were all that stopped the slopping full container plunging down the black hole into the stables below (*where sewage surged and vipers swam in and out of the iron bars of the mangers . . .*) I dug my fingernails deeper into the wood and breathed in quickly. Mice were scratching in the granary. Tomorrow, Sunday, my dad might teach me to shoot; my sister was learning already because she was bigger and stronger.

I jumped off the Elsan without wiping off the wet and fled back through the dark to my campbed, the click of the metal door latch echoing behind me.

A dull boom sounded from the valley. I shivered. They were blasting again, tunnelling under Bohespig Hill, Polish and Irish workmen from the camp at Dalcroy. My father told me men fell asleep on these endless night shifts; one night someone laid a charge carelessly and a whole mountain loch gushed down and out of the entrance to the tunnel, bringing trout and rubble, silt and toads, grass sods and bodies. My father worked on the hydro-electric scheme too, on machines — diggers and crushers, he called them.

I listened. Two blasts, a smaller one. My father turned over in bed, giving out a wheezing breath, almost a cough. My mother never made a sound in her sleep.

In school holidays I'd cycle down the valley and hang around the camp looking at the strange men and the Chinese cooks, or wander along the shelves of grey granite rubble disgorged by the crusher on the river banks where dust turned the water cloudy-white and gathered in deposits of slimy mud along the shores. The crusher had a coat of white and yellow dust; it towered, menacing and dangerous; one day a man's legs were cut off and my father went to the court in Edinburgh to witness for him when he sued the company.

I listened, poker-stiff and craning, all of a sudden sure that I could hear footsteps coming up the outside rickety stair towards the front door. I strained more — Mrs. Thorburn from the farm had been frightened by a man, she said there was a man from the camp gone mad who was walking around naked with staring eyes, so she was keeping Jessie in, but since my mother hadn't said anything and hadn't kept me in I'd forgotten about it.

The noise came again, creak, creak, welling up in my head with the thumping of my heartbeat. He was coming. I tried to count the creaks, each one a step up the wooden stairs, and there were fourteen stairs. He came and came, far more than fourteen steps — I knew he must be taking two steps up, one back, playing and counting in his foreign language with his mad stare, chin stuck out, arms hanging forward with fingers curved to clutch — like the drawings of Paleolithic man in history books. Curved to clutch me, claws curved . . .

And it was morning. I haltingly told my mother what I had heard.

"The hens," she said briskly over her shoulder as she dragged a new calor gas cylinder to the cooker. "The bantams got loose." She straightened up, brushing her hair out of her eyes. "They met me on the top step first thing when I opened the door — silly wee buggers thought they'd get a feed off me, likely."

Belfast 1972

The corner shop sold potato scones, which I'd loved since I was a child. Alistair did too, I discovered. It also sold expensive packaged coal, sunglasses, balaclavas and red and white flags with the emblem of the Red Hand of Ulster — the Ulster Cross. Every shop window in the Protestant areas was stuffed with this paramilitary regalia. The gasman told us that the street was deserted because the Army was moving families out for their own protection. The curtains in the bedroom at the front of the empty rooming-house were floor-length, of crimson sateen — that sateen which has niggling little poly-textured grooves and squiggles; the bed was high, brown and solid, with a counterpane, white with lilac and grey flowers. Into its slippery nylon folds I gasped and sweated my fear as the night events began.

I dozed off for a while, looking at the moon and the streetlights shining through the chink I'd left in the curtain to serve as my lifeline in the strange soggy dark. I dozed into blankness and then there was a *huge blast*.

"Jesus that was near," said Alistair as a rattling of windows began and grew — glass was shattering and falling but it was across the street — and eased; the windows held.

"Christ Alistair that was near." The sounds came out tight and high in a sort of poultry squawk — I felt my head on its stretched neck stuck up absurdly alert from the bed.

"It's late," he said, "one am." He stretched to find a Players, lit one for me and put his arm round me, while I waited through his long silence for my cue — I had no idea how to react. I supposed that he did. I hoped dumbly and fiercely that he would stay right where he was, with the dim-wittedness of semi-sleep persuading him that the soft bed, the Players smoke and our warm tangled legs were the only reality worth focussing on. I strained to see his profile in the dark. Alistair. That was my chosen name, until I turned out to be a girl.

"Of course you know I'll have to go and take a look, love." I was starting to say I'll come too we're working together, after all, when the first gunshots crackled. In that frozen moment I had no idea how near or how far they were, I only knew the bed felt much too high, too level with the window sill; exposed, platformed to the skies like an Indian's corpse, I craved the earth, I craved the carpet, I craved the smell of the dust of the carpet in my nostrils.

"Sounds like the Old Park Road." Alistair walked in front of the window to the wardrobe and dressed himself. He even slipped his reporter's notebook in the pocket of his shiny black mac.

He tried peering through one side of the curtain. As the guns cracked again he leapt back, while I found myself on the floor, on hands and knees, whimpering a bit, glad of the dark which saved me from his eyes.

"They're near — you can see the flashes. It's a heavy gun battle, all right."

Even if he creeps along in the deepest of the shadows close to the walls, that mac can still catch the light, I thought confusedly, but could get not a word out.

"I'll be back love, I'm very cautious. And I'll not be long, I promise."

The bedroom door opened and closed softly. The heavy front door thumped shut, leaving me alone in an empty shell of a house, in a depopulated street, in the middle of a war. Paralysed.

Back into bed I crept, back to my cigarettes and my counterpane and my warm familiar body smells. One finger and thumb strayed to the cuff of my hairy old sweater, twiddled the fluff round and round, comforting, comforting: outside, Alistair's frail body was sliding through the dark which had become (had always been, would always be?) murderous. Across the road a child began to cry with a thin hysterical scream Mammy mammy mammy . . . then I was on the floor again because the guns came again, different guns this time. And the incautious tramp of boots. Shouts of command. The muffled rumble of Saracens. I crossed the rough pile of the carpet caterpillar fashion keeping my head well down until I got to the side of the window. I tweaked the curtain aside and looked — the real scene and my fantasy fitted, apart from a few details. They were slowing down, though, they were stopping; in the centre of the cobbled street they were staring out from the first Saracen, bending double as they raced for the walls, they were throwing up a roadblock *right outside the door*. I jerked my hand away from the curtain and as the last fold swung back into place my eyes filled with an after-image of Armalites sweeping round and up to aim straight at my window. I plunged to the floor. Snipers, they would think, empty house, sniper's gun behind the curtain — shoot first, break the door down.

A hot softness hit my stomach and turned my bowels to liquid and air. An electric rush started up from the base of my spine; my chest constricted; I tried to check it at my throat but I was choking; suddenly it charged my head with dreams and fears from far back in the past.

War had broken out. In an empty house I ran to answer a knock on the door, dreading the visitor as I opened it. A soldier stood there. The machine gun I knew had been waiting for me aimed unerringly; there was no escape. The first bullets ripped into me, I fell on the cold tiles of my grandmother's hall, the jute fibres of the doormat rough against my cheek; there was no escape from those moments, replayed and replayed.

They were talking at the front door. A thump. Argument. Silence. A key a key turned in the lock. A remark in a Scottish accent. Alistair was alive, speaking to the soldiers, thumping up the stairs, plunging breathlessly into the bedroom.

"Did you hear that? Bastards had me up against the wall . . ." I was alive, I was crawling around the carpet in my knickers.

"I saw them put up the roadblock — did they search you?"

"Oh yes. They were really going to do me over. Christ." He sat heavily on the edge of the bed. I crawled back in.

"Were you scared?"

"Petrified."

"I was crawling . . ." I started, but he broke in.

"God, it was awful, love. The bomb was at the bottom of the Ardoyne. Provos must have come over the Old Park looking for whoever laid it."

Fear made Alistair impotent through all these Irish nights.□

The Years Before Eleven

Looking at a marigold
My mind goes back
To early summers on the lawn
There is a lost fragrance
A texture I can't touch again,
The taste of tomatoes in the sun
Cream, soft grass
My screams at night
Her knotted string
And reassuring light.
Earlier walled dense in roses
In between two churches
Large boys attack.
Without your gang
Blushing once with one.
The kids with runny noses
The mystery of crab apples
The journey to allotments.
Whispers as the blacks move in.
The game on logs
Between the gaps
Slippery surfaces
Slithering in socks
Mud pies,
Dusty book lots
Of the Egyptian dead.
You could have used those
After they'd gone
He said.
Some kind of differentness
Taught, on rote, built in
A certain bewilderment.
Some children wore white plimsolls
In the snow,
Stayed by pubs
At night,
Played with toads
In gutter streams.
Some houses had bare boards
And holes.
It was explained
Their parents
Didn't care about them
Not like you.
But when you moved
The neighbours tried
To keep their children
safe.
Said you were common
Said you screamed
Made them dirty
And afraid.
You listened to the wind
Alone.
And learned to sense the rain.
You played
Your stories in your head
A boy
Until breasts
Came
With blood
And pain.

Sheila Rowbotham 1968

Mary Tyler writes about the women she met during the five years she was held without trial in an Indian prison. Today she is active in the campaign for the release of the something like 100,000 political prisoners still detained. Mary was visiting a village in Bihar, India, in May 1970 when she was arrested. She had been in jail for nearly three years before she was finally charged with "conspiracy to wage war against the state". She denied the charge, whilst admitting to sympathizing with the aims of the "Naxalite"¹ movement, to which she was accused of belonging. Soon after her trial opened, in June 1975, the Public Prosecutor petitioned for withdrawal of the case against her, on the grounds that it was "damaging to Commonwealth relations". The judge admitted the petition and she was acquitted.

"The people's care and support carried me through"

In March 1970, as the Kalka Mail carried me across the red plains and through the mango groves of Bihar on the way to Calcutta, I sat by the window idly watching the peasant women turning over the drying paddy with their bare feet in a kind of rhythmic dance, and thinking that, despite the Green Revolution², I had not seen a single tractor in the fields during two months of travelling around in India. I could not imagine that within a few weeks I would be living at close quarters with Bihari peasant women and it would be their care, affection and support that would carry me unscathed through five long years of imprisonment.

From the first I tried to see positive aspects in my internment, and to put it to practical use. I wrote to a friend in England that, if I had to be imprisoned, I was glad it was in India, where I could learn so much. In many ways I was lucky: the inefficiency and corruption of the Indian judicial system had so increased the jail population that the authorities had no facilities for keeping me away from other prisoners. They did their best to frighten off the other women by telling them that I was a prostitute or a witch who knew magic and would harm them. But right from the beginning, curiosity made the bolder among my fellow-prisoners ignore all warnings and intimidations. In the noonday heat, when the wardress was sleeping or having her daily massage, they would approach my cell for a few moments' stolen conversation through

the bars; even though I could not understand their language, I well understood the contrast between their sympathy and friendliness and the inimical attitudes of the jail officials.

The fact that most prisoners are detained for years without trial, even on the pettiest of charges, lent stability to our community. As time went on, and trust and familiarity grew, I established deep and genuine friendships with some of my fellow-prisoners and with the wardresses themselves, for they had no illusions about the government which poverty compelled them to serve. They remarked often that they were as dispensable as flies, and as insignificant in the eyes of their superiors.

Caste and Class

My companions were eager to talk to me about themselves, but it was a long process learning their particular village Hindi, and it took more than two years before I really began to understand the true nature of the jail set-up itself and something of the lives they led outside.

It was then that I realised how superficial is the view even of an informed, interested and concerned visitor to India. Now I was no longer a visitor but a victim; I had really become part of India and had started the long slow process of knowing her.

I soon found that caste and class have become almost synonymous; different castes are more powerful in different regions, but the people with real strength and influence in Bihar are almost invariable members of higher Hindu castes. In jail it was rare to meet a member of the upper castes. My fellow-prisoners were, for the most part, not only poor and illiterate; they were Untouchables, tribal people³ or members of lower castes or minority communities. Very few of them had any criminal background. They were in jail as the result of pressure imposed by a society still largely feudal in its outlook. Bilkish, a young Muslim girl who had eloped and married a Hindu boy, had been arrested under threat of lynching by her relatives and members of the Muslim community. Her husband had been charged with 'rape'. Time and again her uncles came to the jail to threaten and intimidate her into making a statement that her husband had abducted and raped her; if she had done so, the boy would have received a ten-year sentence. Bravely she stood her ground, but it took six months of stubborn resistance to all pressurizing before she and her husband were released, on condition that they leave the area and live ►

"The people's care and support carried me through."

far away. They had not committed any offence against India's 'secular' laws, but the law enforcement agencies had neither the conviction nor the integrity to protect them from the brutalities of a feudalistic society where marriages are negotiated as financial deals and the English term 'love marriage' had been coined in the Hindi language to describe something desperate and daring reserved for film heroines and the uppermost classes of society.

Adultery and Elopement

There were many others, who, like Bilkish, were in prison for 'crimes' which would never have been considered as such in an enlightened society. In Bihar, adultery on the part of a man is considered as understandable and natural; for a woman it is an unforgivable sin. Santi, one of the few Brahman prisoners I ever encountered, had given herself up to the police. She had been persistently illtreated by her husband and had found solace with a man from another caste. When the affair was discovered, she had been beaten, not only by her husband and brothers-in-law, but by her own parents and brothers too. She had been thrown out from both houses and threatened with death if she dared to meet her lover again. He, fearing for his life, had abandoned her; he was afraid to oppose Brahmins, the highest of Hindu castes. After living rough in the jungle for three months, hounded from place to place, under constant threat to her life, Santi had finally begged to be taken into jail custody.

Another girl, Maya, had been pursued all over Bihar by her father and brothers, armed with shotguns. Like most other Bihari girls, she had had her marriage arranged for her at the age of six or seven. On reaching maturity, she was to be sent to her father-in-law's house. (Most girls are sent immediately after their first menstruation.) Meantime, she fell in love with a neighbour's son. Shortly before she was due to be sent to her husband's home, in desperation she ran away with her lover. Finally, exhausted by her family's chase, they surrendered and were imprisoned. Her father was determined to send her to her husband's house because he had arranged her marriage as part of a business contract. Being rich, he bribed the magistrate who passed an order for the girl to be returned to her father. Her lover too was remanded on a charge of abduction and rape.

Village Sanctions

Even if a girl's family is willing to protect her, village society often prevents it from doing so. Uleria had committed adultery whilst her husband was working in another town. He did not send her any money to keep herself and her children, and so she had only too easily succumbed to the invitations of the owner of the house in which they rented



Women work a new pump in a small Indian village

rooms. Her husband disowned her when she gave birth to a child he said was not his. Her father, being fond of her, allowed her to stay in his house; whereupon the village headman and council blocked his road, cut off his water supply and forbade him to draw water from the village well. In addition, they declared his whole family untouchable until he threw Uleria out of the house. They were milkmen by caste and being declared untouchable meant total loss of livelihood, for nobody would buy milk from their cows. And so, to save the rest of his family, he had had to order Uleria out. That was not enough for her husband. He lodged a case against her lover, and in the manner typical of the Bihar Police, he too was arrested. The village headmen, who wield extraordinary powers in the village community, are invariably members of the wealthy upper castes; together with the moneylenders, the landlords and the priests, they exercise an unscrupulous and profitable stranglehold on the villagers' lives. Not infrequently the biggest landowner in the area is also the moneylender and the headman.

Trade in Girls

It was in prison in Jamshedpur, a steel town in the Chhotanagpur tribal belt, that I first came across real abduction cases. The town is permeated with unscrupulous people looking for girls to sell. They find girls from poor or unhappy homes, befriend them, and entice them away from their drudgery with the lure of new clothes, good food, and comfort. The girls are predominantly from the tribal and Harijan (Untouchable) communities. These, the poorest sections of society are looked upon with disdain and distaste by upper-caste Hindus. The procuresses and racketeers who run the girl trade make enormous profits by selling these girls as objects of entertainment to prosperous farmers, businessmen or brothel-keepers all over the country.

In jail I encountered both the procuresses and their commodities, the girls. The abductresses either bribed the judge for the acquittal, as in one case I witnessed, or managed to get themselves released on bail, so they could continue plying their lucrative business. The girls they had been selling remained



MARGARET MURRAY (COURTESY CHRISTIAN AID)

ter had been made pregnant by the son of the village headman. Naturally he would not consider marrying her. So Panno had had to endure the taunts, abuse and shame of her daughter's 'lost honour'. She and her son had first given the girl a severe beating, but unable to bear the continuing ostracism from the village community, she had taken her daughter into the jungle on the pretext of gathering firewood, then battered her to death with a big stone. Thus she fulfilled the requirements of 'respectability' and was resigned to twenty years in jail. Kormi was a young widow. She had had five pregnancies, but only one child had survived infancy. After her husband's death, her brother-in-law had made sexual advances to her, as was his 'right', she being his brother's widow. When she became pregnant, unable to face the prospect of another miscarriage or infant death, she had carried out an abortion on herself. Her brother-in-law had had her arrested on a murder charge.

Buying Caste Back

As in Britain, one of the worst problems a prisoner faces is her return to society. But in India the problem is less complex, and has a simple solution: money. For many months, I shared a cell with Birsi, an old, very poor woman of the Ganjhu tribe. I used to notice that she ate barely sufficient to keep herself alive, she hoarded all her rice, oil and soap quotas to sell to the jail staff at less than half the market prices; not, as other prisoners did, to buy herself clothes, bangles or nice things to eat; she never bought anything, though she was in rags. Time and again I tried to encourage her to eat properly and explained the futility of saving her few rupees — the cost of living was rising at such a rate that they would be worthless by the time she was released. She remained silent, and I guessed that she was thinking of her only daughter and did not want to buy clothes for herself whilst her child outside perhaps was naked and hungry. I suggested she buy a new sari and keep it for her girl. It was then that I finally discovered the reason for her miserliness. She explained that she was saving all her money for when she left jail because she would need several hundred rupees to buy back her caste. She would have to sacrifice a goat, provide food and offerings for the Brahman priest and other Brahmans of the village, pay her fillage headman and council and stand all the other villagers a feast in order to appease them and regain her caste status. If she failed to fulfil these requirements, she would remain an outcaste; the villagers would not associate with her, she would have to live in a separate hut, alone, and eat food and drink water fetched to her by others. Nobody would eat anything she cooked or drink water offered by her, she would not be allowed to use the well, and everything touched by her would be regarded as contaminated. It was fear of social isolation that was compelling her to save and hoard every coin half-starve herself and live in rags. ►

in jail, because they were too poor to arrange their bail or release. One particularly unpleasant woman whose whole family was engaged in the selling of girls to Punjab, continued her nasty trade even from inside the jail. She used to look for likely girls among the younger prisoners, those who had no family or had been abandoned by their families. She would befriend them by showing some initial generosity or concern, then arrange with one of her daughters outside to stand their bail. Upon release they would accompany the girls to distant parts and sell them. Naturally they had a well-established marketing network. Once on bail the probability of one's case coming up in court is very slight so they had no fears on that score.

This was not the only instance I came across of tribal girls being regarded as legitimate game for rich or high-caste men. Our wardresses were mainly tribal women who had been converted by the Christian missionaries. They frequently had to parry the lewd advances of the warders and baboos (clerical officers). Sometimes it went further. One war-

dress fell asleep on night duty and was hauled up before the jailer. Unsolicited by her, the chief warder, a Brahman, intervened and saved her from a dressing down. A few days later he accosted her husband in the road and asked him to send his wife along one afternoon. He had saved her job and wanted his payment — her body. As she did not satisfy this demand, he was constantly threatening to get her sacked. She was in a dilemma; she desperately needed the job to feed her own children and her younger brothers and sisters; but the price of keeping it promised to be too high. Members of higher castes would never dream of 'defiling' themselves by marrying a low-caste girl; but they are notorious for using tribal and Untouchable girls as sexual objects.

Abortion and Infanticide

I discovered that the pressures of this feudalistic society often drove women to dangerous abortions or even murder. Panno was an old woman of the Santhal tribe. All night long she would toss and turn and mutter and see dreadful dreams of the daughter she had killed. Her daugh-

"The people's care and support carried me through."

Sham Democracy

I found old Birsi's story corroborated by other prisoners. On entering jail, where she will have to live at close quarters with persons from different castes and eat food cooked by persons of castes unknown, any Hindu automatically loses her caste, whether or not she is eventually convicted. On leaving jail, she will have to perform elaborate and costly rituals and penances in order to regain it. In some castes there was no way at all in which the women could be accepted back into society after being in jail. As on many occasions I realised that, despite the Government's assertions that India was a socialist, democratic and secular state, the real power in the villages lies with the feudal elements, and that whatever laws, plans and reforms may exist on paper, they are remote from the reality of the everyday lives and problems of the peasants who form over eighty percent of the population. It is not surprising that I found the women I lived with eager for change, and fascinated to hear stories of the outside world. Up till then they had no concept of what a newspaper is, or any idea of what lay a few miles beyond their villages. They had heard of Delhi, of the Government, of Indira Gandhi, but these words were little more than names to them. They were, however, remarkably contemptuous of the government and

scornfully dismissive of elections, which they knew were nothing but a sham show of democracy, incapable under the present system of bringing about any real change or improvement in conditions or attitudes. I used to try to explain to them the concept of peasants' committees and land redistribution, or co-operative farming and decisions being taken by the people themselves. They were eager and often asked me how long it would take for poor people's government to be established in India. All I could tell them was that there are many patriotic and selfless Indians working for that goal and that with the co-operation and participation of themselves, the people, their aspirations could be realised. Try as the Government may to stamp out opposition, the flame of the Naxalbari peasant revolt is still flickering and there are always people to replace those the Government interns.

Living with the peasant women of Bihar, I developed an ever deeper respect, love and concern for them. I found them the toughest and bravest people I had ever met; they knew death, infant mortality, miscarriages, hunger, sickness, widowhood, hard labour, beating and every imaginable hardship as everyday occurrences; and yet they had room still for love and affection, generosity and kindness, humour and laughter. They nursed me, aided me, tended and cherished me, and thanks to them, and not to the Indian Government, my years in prison were not only tolerable but rewarding. □

¹ The name "Naxalite" derives from the village of Naxalbari in North Bengal, where, in Spring 1967, an armed peasant revolt started, inspiring a wave of similar uprisings in other parts of India. The revolt was aimed at the big landlords and moneylenders who hold the poor peasantry in constant penury. It developed into a programme to seize land and distribute it among the poor peasants and to establish people's political power. The Naxalite movement drew in thousands of educated youths from the cities, who left their homes to join the peasants' struggles in the countryside. Despite mass arrests, killings and repression on the part of the Government, especially in 1970-71, the Naxalite movement was never entirely wiped out. Today it has re-established itself in some of its old bases and its influence is on the increase again.

² The Green Revolution of the late 1960s was an American inspired "aid" programme which could only benefit rich farmers as it required capital intensive farming with excessive dependence on improved grain, fertilizer and machinery.

A useful pamphlet is *The Death of The Green Revolution* (Haslemere Group, 15p) available from Rising Free, 197 Kings Cross Road, London WC1.

³ The tribal people are descendants of the original inhabitants of the sub-continent prior to the Aryan invasion.

Mary is writing a book on her experiences.

Anyone interested in working for or hearing more details about the campaign in this country for the release of Indian political prisoners should contact the Alliance Against Fascist Dictatorship in India at 117 Hampton Road, London E7.



If you are an engineering staff worker

JOIN TASS

The staff section of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers

If you oppose sex discrimination in jobs, in pay, in opportunity

JOIN TASS

Don't let the employers organise you out of equal pay and equal opportunities. Legislation will not be enough.

YOU NEED ORGANISATION NEGOTIATION

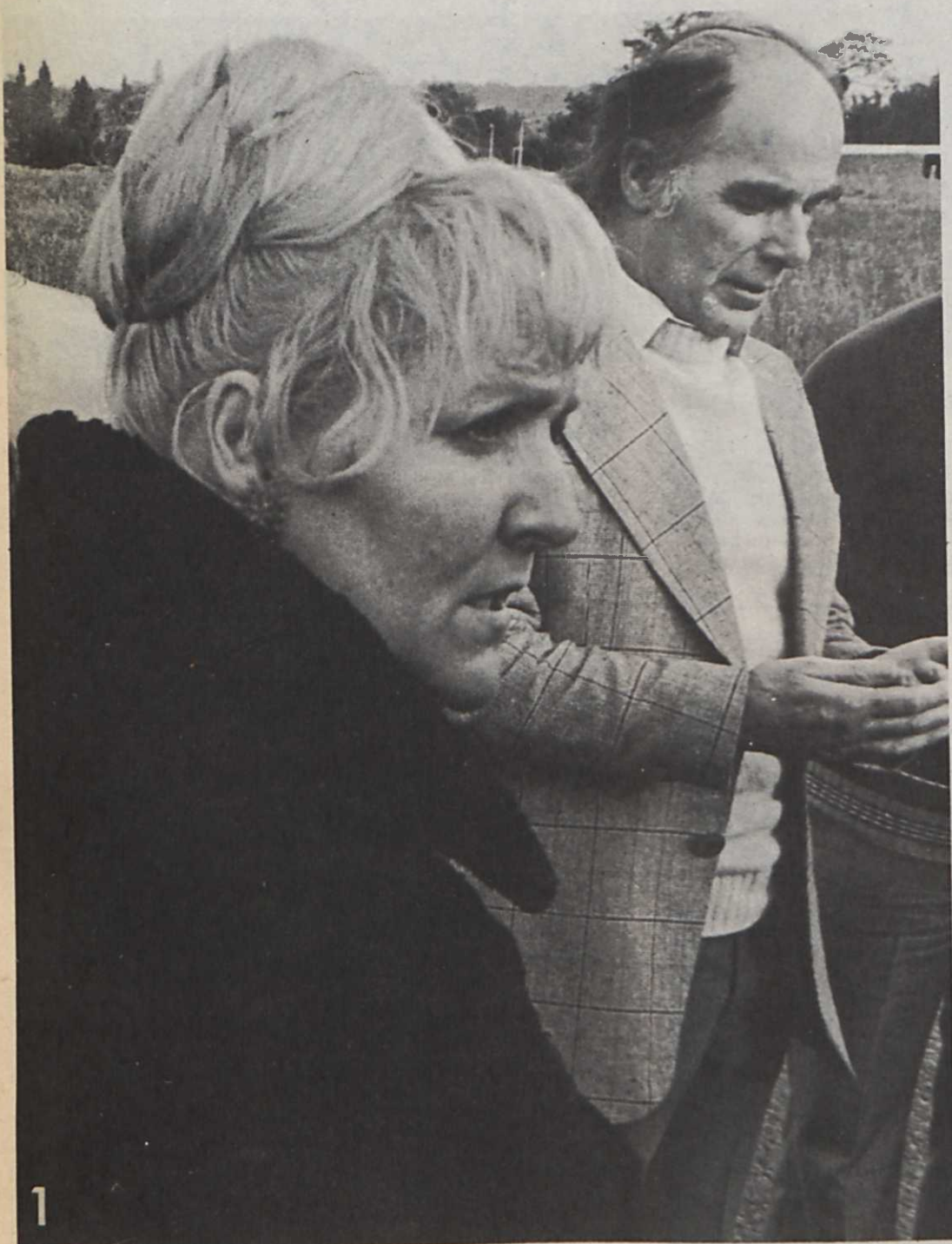
As well as legislation.

Write for application, or organise a meeting.

Contact: Judith Hunt, National Womens Officer, Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers, Technical Administrative and Supervisory Section, Onslow Hall, Little Green, Richmond, Surrey.



NEWS



1: IPSWICH: MEN'S SUPPORT HELPS WOMEN WIN

Assistant buyer Norma Eltringham (left) on the equal pay picket line with fulltime local TASS official Tony Foley last October. This strike was sparked off on the initiative of four women office workers at Louis Newmarks, an Ipswich engineering factory.

"I keep control of records. The system is mine," Norma Eltringham said. "Without it they wouldn't know what stock they'd got without literally going and counting it. They don't feel it is very responsible, but I do. If I didn't get the stuff in, then the men couldn't get the jobs done. We are central to the organisation of work in the factory." But Norma Eltringham's rate was only £30, a good £10 less than rates in a nearby factory.

Last spring management began reviewing the 60-odd male production workers' wages, and it was only when the women's demands were rejected that they joined a union — TASS, the staff section of the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers.

"It didn't seem right to take such strong action", one of the women said. "But when you get ignored you've got to."

During the first Monday of the strike the men held a meeting. They knew about the breakdown of talks. "The shop floor felt so disgusted that we felt we should come out", said convenor Ralph Main.

Three days after picketing began management agreed to concede £6 immediately to all the women — and to all the male workers, an unexpected bonus.

"When you consider that these women had never been in a union before", said Tony Foley, "and that they have cleared the air and are now a force to be reckoned with, then this is a satisfactory result." ▸

Equal Pay and The Crisis

*In what conditions are women workers most able to defend their interests?
Photo-survey of industrial action as Equal Pay became law*



2: "I COULD HAVE HUGGED EVERY ONE OF THEM"

Left to right: Norma Eltringham; Diane Driver, post and switchboard; assistant cook Gertrude North, who joined TASS and came out in solidarity with the other women; Gay Lydyard, the firm's secretary; and Gail Driver, technical assistant. They are supported by two production workers on the Newmark picket line.

"You don't know what it felt like on Monday when we stood out here on our own and the men came out", said Norma Eltringham. "I could have hugged every one of them."

The Newmark strike was similar to an engineering equal pay strike in the West Midlands, also last October. The strike at Bronx Engineering escalated when 120 male colleagues worked out a rota system to stop work and join the 27 women — on strike for the first time in their lives — on the picket line. Bronx management had warned: "Return to normal working or be suspended" — and the men came out in sympathy.

3: "THIS WAS THE FIRST OF MANY"



"This was the first of many equal pay strikes that our union has been involved in", said Judith Hunt, AUEW-TASS national women's organiser, shown here (centre) on the Newmark picket line.

It was the full support of the shop floor which was crucial, she added, pointing out that the women hadn't expected this "because it wasn't the men's issue."

At the beginning of February TASS was involved in five equal pay disputes — three in Scotland, one in Birmingham, and one in London — "and there are getting near 100 claims on the table", Ms Hunt added.

TASS has aimed to expose the limitations of the Equal Pay Act. Latest Department of Employment figures show men's gross fulltime weekly earnings at £60.8 and women's at £37.4, and the TASS salary census points to a male/female difference of between £9 and £15 per week in all job categories.

But Equal Pay legislation won't solve this problem, the union stresses. Traditional segregation of male and female labour into separate section and job categories means the act applies to a minority of workers only.

"Typists, clerks, secretaries and technical assistants have had years of 'on the job' training", says the latest TASS leaflet 'Negotiating for Equality', published last month. "This is skilled work and therefore must be paid accordingly." Men's pay for women is the TASS target for 1976, and the union estimates that women need a minimum of £10 a week to move towards it — but equal pay rises may legally exceed the Government's £6 ceiling on wage increases.

In 1975, while women were losing their jobs 100% faster than the previous year, and 50% faster than men, the Scottish TUC women's advisory committee proposed at Congress that "the major concern is the increase in male unemployment, which is causing hardship in many breadwinners' homes". But it was an unemployment amendment from TASS, rejecting the idea that women can be sacked first, which was successful.▷



4



5



6

4, 5, 6: GLASGOW: RESISTING REDUNDANCY

280 razor-blade workers, many of them women, occupy the Personna plant in Hillingdon, Glasgow, last October. They were resisting a redundancy involving 40 workers, the fourth batch of redundancies since March.

Personna is a subsidiary of the American-owned Philip Morris group which operates in 37 different countries. Management hoped to ensure the same production by multi-manning of machines (one worker on two machines) and complete flexibility of labour on the shop floor.

It was this move which prompted a strike at the end of September, involving round-the-clock picketing. The decision to occupy was taken at a mass meeting on October 18 in the face of management's refusal to withdraw the redundancy threat. A 24-hour, seven day, three-shift rota system went into operation, involving all the workforce, all but 46 of whom were in the AUEW. The rest were in TASS.

Support came from Hull dockers and East Scotland miners, and the occupation was transformed into "more than just

another industrial dispute", said AUEW shop steward Betty Franci. The strike committee organised folk and pop concerts inside the factory, and the West London Theatre Workshop came to perform their play about the National Abortion Campaign.

The right to sit in is not secured by law in the same way as the right to strike, however. Sitting in is a civil wrong against which the owner can seek a court order, and a sit in organised by a group of workers may come within the criminal law of conspiracy.

Earlier in 1975, in fact, the Law Commission recommended creating a new criminal offence, of being unlawfully on someone else's property and refusing to leave. The TUC opposed this strongly, and debated sit ins at its September Congress in Blackpool.

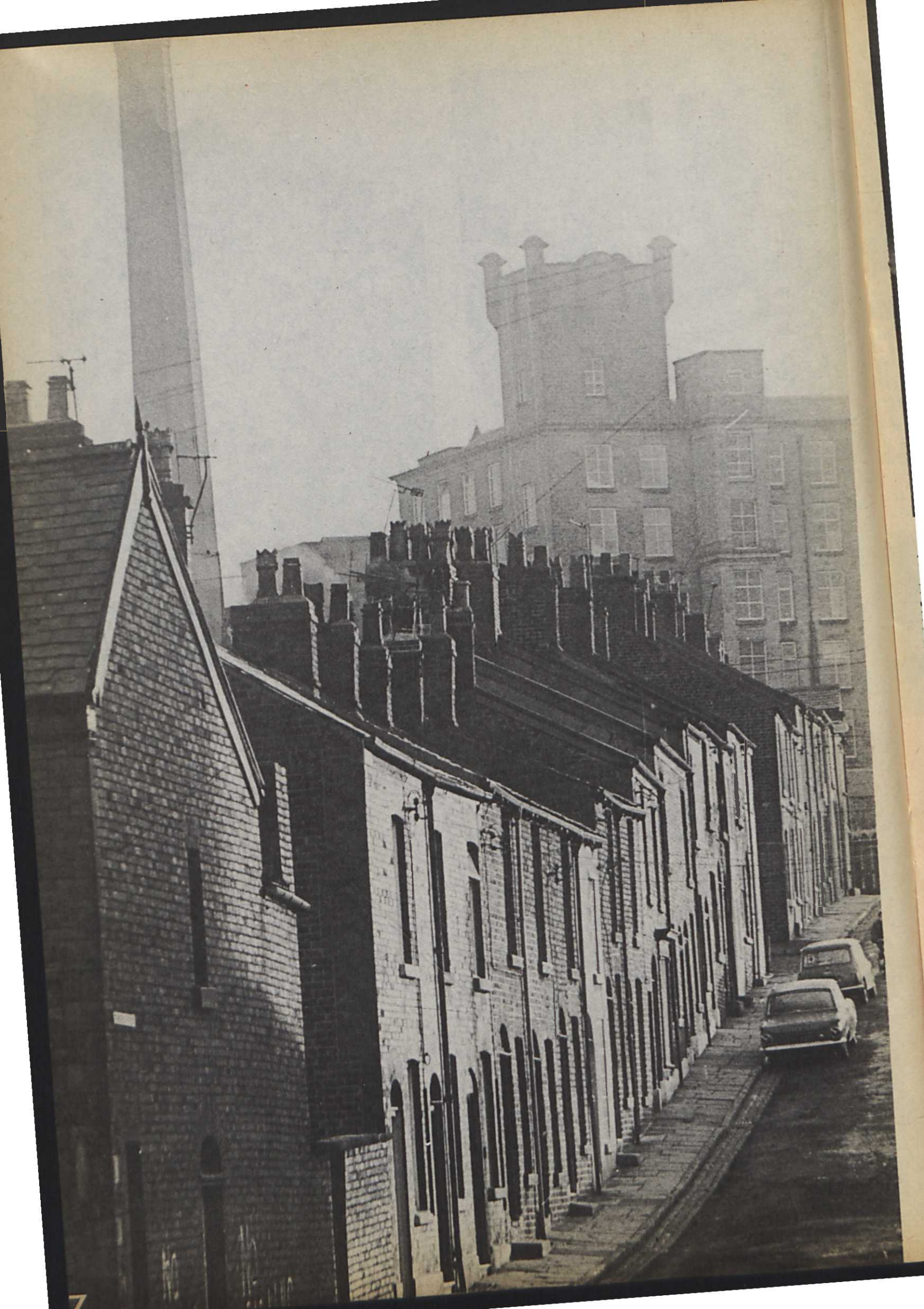
Speaking to a motion opposing any move to make work-ins illegal, Grenville Clay (AUEW-TASS) said that sit ins were becoming more effective in resisting redundancies and even closure of plants.

But redundancy can come with suddenness. 400 women workers at a South Wales clothing factory occupied the Corah plant, Rhymney Valley, in August when they were told the whole works would close in a few days time. Management said the factory was too far away and there had been a drop in orders — the factory had been a regular supplier of Marks & Spencer.

"This factory has been here for 27 years, and now they suddenly discover it's too far away" said one picketer. National Union of Tailor and Garment Workers shop steward Myrtle Jones said it would take years to get together a skilled workforce like theirs. She wanted another firm to take them over, and the women wanted to occupy until they got a guarantee that their employment would continue.

Unemployment in the area was already three times the national average, and jobs would only be found by making the long journey to Cardiff, Newport or Merthyr. In fact they had to accept some redundancies in exchange for the plant staying open.

"It seemed so secure", said one worker, a machinist for four years, "and then someone just comes along and says you haven't got a job any more."▷





7, 8, 9: CLOSURES IN BOLLINGTON

Redundancies cannot always be resisted in an industry in crisis. The Adelphi (*left*) was the last of five big textile mills in Bollington, Lancashire, to close. 250 workers, of whom a third were women packers, were employed in this Courtaulds factory at the foot of the Pennines. In the last year the workforce had been cut to 150 — trade union organisation was weak — and many of the machines ripped out. At the end, only one floor was in operation.

Granada Northern Documentary filmed the men's discussion in the pub on the day of the last shift, November 29 (*below*) and asked the women to join them later (*above*). The women had earlier watched North West Spanner's play 'Winding Up' and were amazed by its closeness to their own situation.

Bollington is increasingly providing male workers for nearby Macclesfield. Its mills have been converted to warehouses.▷





10, 11: CLOTHING IN CRISIS

Workers from the Empress, Wigan, and other textile mills meet and rally to protest the closure of factories in Lancashire (above and top right). By last March 350 jobs had been lost in Courtauld's Empress. Anger and irony were expressed in one woman's placard: "Out of the gloom a voice said unto me: 'Smile and be happy, things could be worse.' So I smiled and was happy — and behold things *did* get worse!"

The textile industry has been declining for many years, but 1975 was especially serious. 10,000 jobs in textiles, clothing and footwear were lost in its last three months. Almost 10% of the total workforce has been lost since 1973.

Plants in Nottingham, Leicester, Huddersfield and Bradford closed at a faster rate last year than any time since the major rationalisations of the fifties and sixties. And speaking for Nypco Ltd. at the Scunthorpe enquiry into June's explosion

at the Flixborough chemical plant, John Roch said that 35,000 jobs in textiles had been put at risk by the 28 Flixborough deaths. The explosion had cost Britain £60m in imports, he added.

The depression in textiles is reflected in its wages. Last April the Low Pay Unit reported that clothing industry wages, already among the lowest in the country, were failing to keep pace with inflation. None of the 300,000 workers covered by ten wages councils had a minimum wage of even £25 per week, six months after the TUC set a minimum wage target of £30 a week — clothing workers were not getting threshold increases, unlike most other industrial workers.

The Shirt Manufacturers Federation alleged in October that imports from low wage countries would take 65% of the total British shirt market. "The choice before the government is clear. Jobs for the people of Britain, or jobs for the people of Taiwan, Korea and Hong Kong." This is the stark ministerial situation, the

Federation continued, "and no amount of ministerial blah can alter it."

The Government followed by announcing a £20m investment into the clothing industry over three years with the aim of improving productivity and efficiency, and protecting 340,000 jobs. Available under Section 8 of the 1972 Industry Act, this aid must be applied for before the end of 1976. But confined to medium and long term measures only, the government's plans have provoked discontent.

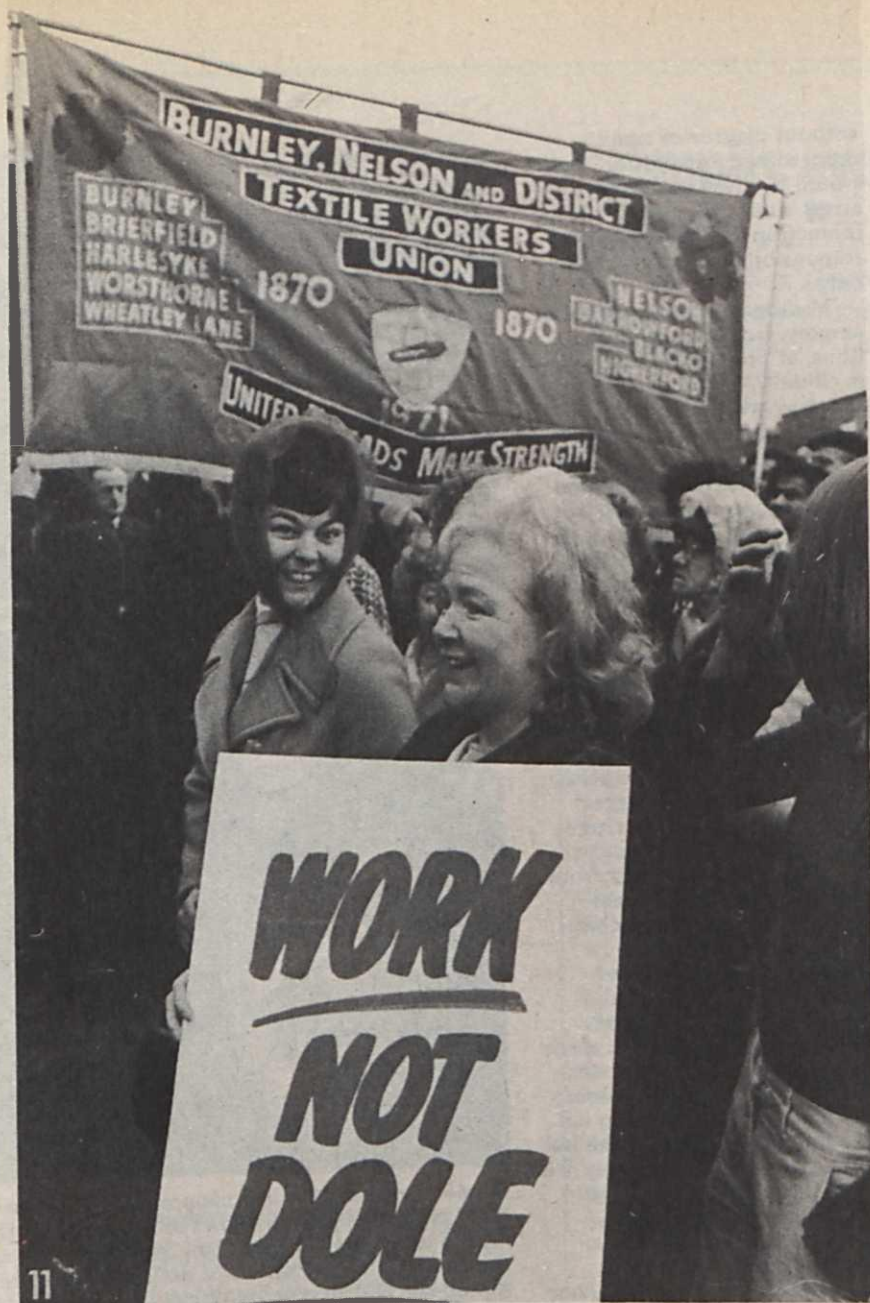
November and December brought widespread action by workers in the clothing and hosiery industries. 700 women at a Courtauld-owned St Helen's clothing factory struck on November 6 for a £6 pay increase after a management offer of £3.60. 500 Courtauld women at the Liverpool factory joined them, and a week later 2,000 women in eight South Wales clothing factories, all part of the North-gate group of Courtaulds, came out for the full £6.

Meanwhile hosiery workers

were demanding no closures, no redundancies, and government controls on the import of cheap foreign textiles. A mass demonstration was held in Alloa to safeguard all 550 jobs at the Donbros knitwear factory, which was threatened with a move to Leicester.

The executive of the 70,000-strong National Union of Hosiery and Knitwear Workers decided on national industrial action for better pay at the end of November. Workers were asked not to work Mondays until the full £6 — due under a national agreement — was conceded. The request came in response to a 10% pay offer from the Knitting Industries Federation and Courtauld, due to take effect on January 1 this year. But 10% is insignificant in an industry where a skilled machinist at the Kayser Bondor plant in Merthyr Tydfil, a worker in the factory for three years, earns £28 per week.

Militancy has been effective. 21 days and nights of picketing won the 400 Kayser Bondor workers a £6 rise on



12: DREAM COMES TRUE?

Secretary of State for Employment Michael Foot (*back to camera, below*) gathers a variety of supporters in Whitehall to celebrate Equal Pay Day, December 29 1975. Announcing that women had waited since 1888 for equal pay, he reminded those present (*see also p24*) that 1976 was to be the year when "the dream was to come true". Employers had been given five years to prepare for equal pay, he added.

Economic realities are worth noting here. None of the 20 top private sector companies interviewed last year had a written group-wide policy of equal opportunities for women, and only a third claimed to be working for one. The number of girls going into apprenticeships in 1974 was the lowest since 1970, while 18% more boys entered apprenticeships in the same year.

Delegates at a General & Municipal Workers Union conference in December referred to the grading of women's work at the lowest male rate, making equal pay "void". And N W Ferranti convenor Betty Crawford pointed out tersely that "The real position in engineering is that women have been moved to the pay category of semi-skilled."

The meaning is clear, and expressed in the words of Bronx Engineering striker Joyce Golding. "We have got to fight. It's not only for ourselves we have got to make this effort, but for future generations of women in this factory. Otherwise women will always stay in the position they are." □

November 28. A national NUTGW ballot on December 1 showed the great majority of members in favour of strike action for the full £6. At the same time the NUHKW was insisting that the same wage increase be made payable to all women workers, many of whom were getting less than £30 per week, and would get under £3 if the employers' offer was accepted.

Courtauld conceded the full £6 increase on December 15, to be made in two instalments: £4 on January 1 and £2 this coming June. 80% of NUHKW membership will be covered by this rise. The crisis remains deep, however, and the workers' future uncertain. Reid Herrick, president of the Knitting Industries Federation, warned in November that 11,000 jobs in the industry had been lost through the year, and output was down 20% in the third quarter. Even so, this year began with NUHKW plans for "escalated action" against firms refusing to pay the full £6 increase.▷

RESEARCHED BY ANN SCOTT AT THE MORNING STAR LIBRARY
PICTURES BY JOHN STURROCK (REPORT)

Injunctions easier?

The National Women's Aid Federation has called on women everywhere to support a Domestic Violence Bill whose second reading in the House of Commons was on February 13.

Introduced by Barking MP Jo Richardson, the Bill would improve the legal position of battered wives.

At present women will often not take out injunctions because they involve big decisions on their futures. Under the new Bill women could apply for injunctions

without divorce or assault proceedings. In addition, police would be given authority to arrest a man who broke an injunction — at present the responsibility of court staff only.

Magistrates courts would be empowered to grant injunctions, at present granted only in County, Divorce or High courts — which are often "inaccessible and unknown", reports the Federation.

The Federation, the democratic organisation of 64 Women's Aid groups throughout England and Wales, feels that this legislation must not be allowed to fall. □

New Home Ex-Holloway

A group of women are getting together a house in Islington for young single women coming out of Holloway Prison.

May Hobbs talked to Maggie Tuttle of the Prisoners' Wives Union, who agreed that it's much harder for young single women — a married woman or a woman with kids can get some sort of help from the Social Services and Social Security.

The women found a house at 16 Richmond Avenue, N1, went to the GLC and were given it, with a promise of money — but only after the place is fixed up properly.

"This will be the first house like this in London", the group

said. "There are two in Manchester, run by the National Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders. But if NACRO are going to give money, why start in Manchester? Holloway is the biggest women's prison and it's here in Islington.

"We asked for money from NACRO, but they refused because we haven't got charitable status. Yet Googie Withers — you know, the governor of that dreadful programme 'Within These Walls' — got money from them for the houses in Manchester.

"We don't want any bloody wardens — if you've come out of a hole like Holloway the last thing you want is a warden. We want the girls to sort things out for themselves." □

Send money c/o 2 St Pauls Road, London N1, or ring Helen 01-348 6304 if you have furniture to give.



ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)

Some of several hundred supporters of a three-day conference in Milan in January to mark the beginning of the second year of the campaign for an Italian referendum on abortion, called for last year by a petition of 800,000 signatures. By constitutional law this referendum must take place before the end of April. □

MARCH MARCH MARCH
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

WOMEN! SHOW SOLIDARITY WITH WOMEN ON MARCH 6

DETAILS: Workshop 01-836 6081

THIS IS A WOMEN'S MARCH MEN ARE ASKED TO SHOW THEIR SUPPORT, NOT BY MARCHING BUT BY ORGANISING CHILDCARE, ETC.

SCOTTISH WL ANNUAL CONFERENCE:
March 20/21 at Students Union, St Andrews, Fife. Planning meeting will be held Sat Feb 21 at Scottish Workshop, 4 Flemming Place, St Andrews, 11am. For travel details or more information phone St Andrews 5705

SEXUAL RIGHTS CHARTER
This article will now appear in the next issue.

Much Afoot about Nothing?

On January 5 "The Rt. Hon. Michael Foot MP, Secretary of State for Employment, and Mrs Foot" invited stars from the Media, British Industry and the Department of Employment to a mass cocktail party to celebrate the implementation of the Equal Pay Act. Most of the 500 were marking the end of the struggle for equal pay and women's rights — a struggle which had not been theirs. It was a depressing publicity stunt.

JOHN STURROCK (REPORT)



Rose Davis during the Christmas picket

Appeal Refused

East End cab-driver George Davis has been refused leave to appeal against his conviction for armed robbery. His 20-year sentence was cut to 17 years, however.

"It comes as no surprise to me", said Rose Davis on December 9. "The Appeals Court only listens to technical legal arguments. It doesn't listen to evidence and in fact absolutely refused to allow new witnesses to be called."

The Court were not considering the flimsy identification evidence which led to Davis' conviction — nor the fact that some of the police officers on the case are currently being investigated by Scotland Yard's own corruption squad.

The Justice for George Davis Campaign continued with a three day Christmas picket of New Scotland Yard (above). Rose Davis, her children, friends and supporters camped out in a van with sleeping bags, turkey and portable TV. □
Justice for George Davis Campaign, 59 Belton Way, Bow E3.

ANGELA PHILLIPS (IFL)



VICAR SPEAKS OUT

"Probably you think all Christians are anti-abortion", said Liverpool vicar Rev T F Robinson (above) at an Abortion Law Reform Conference in London in January.

Rev Robinson had moved a successful resolution supporting the 1967 Abortion Act at Liverpool's Diocesan Synod last November.

On the platform with him were (left to right) author and campaigner Madeleine Simms, barrister Helena Kennedy, solicitor Tess Gill and ALRA Executive member Teresa Woodcraft.

Speaking for ALRA, Tess Gill outlined proposals for a liberalising Bill to be introduced into the House of Lords.

"We want to repeal all the laws which make abortion a crime, and lay a duty on the Secretary of State to provide abortion on the NHS." □

"Happily ever after..."

How will the Sex Discrimination Act affect the marriage 'contract'? The Women's Liberation Campaign for Financial and Legal Independence continues their series.

Girls' comic stories, not to say all fairy tales, end with "... and they were married and lived happily ever after." When girls imagine their future lives, they usually see marriage as a climax — an achievement assuring them of a meal ticket for life. It is men who are 'trapped' into marriage, which exists to 'protect' women and children.

The assumption that everybody marries is the excuse for giving short shrift to the single — higher taxes, housing difficulties, the social stigma of being uncoupled. But for women, married or single, it's even worse. They are going to be provided for by a man, so there's no reason to worry about giving them decent pay or pensions of their own, and because they are going to be out of paid employment at some stage in their lives and their main interest is, of course, in the home, they don't want responsibility or training or even interesting work.

But does the marriage 'contract' protect you and give you financial security? It certainly makes you a dependent. There's no possibility of writing that out of the contract. Marriage is not like other contracts where the two parties can stipulate the terms and can dissolve the agreement by mutual consent. The couple are never told the terms of the contract when they apply to get married and in fact there is no one place they can go to look them up. It is simply assumed in a whole series of laws and practices that the husband is the principal earner and head of the family:

★ You can both only get very poorly paid jobs: if he is employed full-time you can claim family income supplement, but you can't if it is you that gets the full-time job.

★ If you have a joint passport, he appears as 'bearer', you appear as 'spouse'; he can use it to travel on his own, you can't. The children take his nationality and name.

★ He has the right to know your income (he has to complete the tax form), but you

have no right to know his. Any tax rebate due on your income will go to him.

★ You complain to the Gas Board; they write back to him.

★ You both lose your jobs and have worked long enough to get unemployment benefit; he gets extra for the children; you don't.

New Legal Practice

Following a recent law case, if it is you that deals with the solicitor when selling your jointly-owned house, the solicitor can be accused of negligence because "a solicitor should not take instruction from a wife when a husband is also available".

You have been working in the same factory for the last five years: management calls for redundancies: the union says that he stays, you go — after all, he has a wife and two kids to support.

But what about that promise of protection and financial security? He may be the breadwinner, but there is no way you can make him hand over the money. The power is in his hands. He may choose to treat you well. If not — if he doesn't give you enough for the house-keeping, or if he starts to beat you up — then nobody will intervene unless you admit that your marriage has irretrievably broken down and institute divorce or separation proceedings.

So what protection do you get if the marriage ends? Very little. You get rather more if your husband dies, for there are widows' allowances (if he has paid enough contributions and he is under no obligation to tell you if he has) and you have the right to inherit part of any property he had, even if he has tried to leave it all to somebody else.

If the marriage ends in divorce and you are awarded maintenance, it certainly won't maintain your previous standard of living and the odds are that your ex-husband won't pay it anyway. You will probably get custody of the children if they are young, unless you are a lesbian. But if they are older they may be given to their father — naturally he is better able to provide for them financially.

Change To Come?

How much of all this will be altered by the much-heralded Sex Discrimination Act?

Nothing — except for the redundancies case. Social security, national insurance, taxation and matrimonial and family law are completely excluded from the Act □

EVENTS CLASSIFIEDS

WOMEN AND THE CUTS!
 The Women's Charter campaign. Planned for 28th February at Friends Meeting House, Euston Road. To discuss the cuts in public expenditure, particularly as they affect women and the fight back. Open to all sections of the labour movement who support the Charter and the fight against the cuts. For further information regarding sponsorship, delegates, planning meetings etc contact Michele Ryan, 39 Parkholme Road, London E8 Tel: 01 249 3072.

"OLDER WOMEN interested in Womens Liberation. Discussion 8 pm 9-March 228 Ruskin Park House, SE5. For further details ring 01-883 3666."

Singers Club. Every Saturday at Union Tavern, Lloyd Baker Street, WC1. Residents include: Peggy Seeger, Ewan MacColl, Sandra Kerr, Frankie Armstrong. Feb 21st Frankie Armstrong, Brian Pearson, Terry Yarnell. On March 20 Sandra and Frankie feature Women in Folk Song 40p.



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ACCOM. OFFERED
Collective household offers large pleasant room for person/s prepared to share responsibility for small children in N. London. Box 446.

ACCOMMODATION in comfortable house in busy Leicestershire village with lots of garden countryside and money for someone who loves babies and would care for Lucy (3 months) while Mum finishes solicitor training. Box 445.

Room to let in feminist flat in tidy feminist lesbian welcome. 58 to Kings Cross 19 minutes. 01-440 7964 evenings.

COMMUNES AND COMMUNITIES
Semi-rural community starting, needs people with commitment to self-created work situations. 588 Handel Street, Huddersfield.
 Commune near Cambridge seeks practical people. Newmarket 741584.

COMMUNAL GROUP Small group adults wish to join/form rural commune. Interests: self-sufficiency, hard work, warm relationships, children and positive education. Long-term commitment? Look forward to meeting others. Box 447.

AWARE PEOPLE interested in setting up commune in London or possibly Sheffield area please contact Margaret 01-485 0077.

COMMUNITY near Ipswich seeks new members with at least £5,700 capital. Very large house, 56 acres. Tel: East Bergholt 294.

COURSES
KIDS WELCOME at introductory Women's Studies course at Middlesex Polytechnic, The Burroughs, Hendon, NW4. Starting Feb 19th, 10-12 am. Lectures and informal discussions on women's role, Women's Movement, sexuality, women in politics etc. Speakers include Joyce Butler MP, Beatrix Campbell, Jean French. £2 with creche. Phone Stella Rosenak on 202 6545, or just come along any Thursday morning.

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RESEARCH MATERIAL ON WOMAN AND SOCIETY. Enquire for specialist catalogues. **TARA BOOKS LTD**, Shortacre Park Rd, Winchester, Hants. Winchester 2239.

PAPER for only lesbian friends. magazine. Euston, 50p inc post. 39 Wardour St, London W1A 3HA. Meetings and info. Tuesday 8.30 in upstairs room. The Odeon, Chesham Place, London W2. W14 9JF. 40p admission. London W14 9JF.

Rising Free, left-wing bookshop, 197 Kings Cross Rd, London WC1. Large selection of radical women's literature with mail order service. Including: **VD HANDBOOK** 8p, **PAMPHLET OF THE FIRST WOMEN AND HEALTH CONFERENCE SHEFFIELD** 15p, **CIRCLE ONE**, a woman's guide to self-health and sexuality 80p.

THERAPY
PRIMAL THERAPY write Jenny James, Atlantis, Burtonport, Letter-Kenny, Co Donegal, Eire.
Woman psychotherapist (Jungian) now has vacancies in Highgate area. Tel: 01-348 5593 before 10 am.

PERSONAL
Feminist woman Archaeology student wants to hear from others to exchange ideas, information: Mueller, 50 Southgrove Rd, Sheffield.
Lesbian Pisces (20) artist seeks affectionate friend (20-25) easy-going!! Box 444.
Girl 28, Nottingham, wishes to meet similar for outings, share interests and companionship. Box 443.
Reading University Sociology finalist (female) am told attractive but inexperienced with girls, wishes to meet cool thin gay girl. Box 449.

American male urgently needs marriage with British born female to stay in country. Absolutely no obligations. **Rene Goodman**, 50 Shirlock Rd, London NW3.

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WORK
MALE 27 wants work as cook/ housekeeper. Single women or couples, preferably in Birmingham area. Box 440.

GROUPS
MEN IN CROYDON/surrounding area, interested in forming an anti-sexist group are invited to write - Stuart. Box 441.
HEXHAM AREA Northumberland women's group starting. Phone Anne Stocksfield. 3872.

Girl wishing to join women's group in Hammersmith/Fulham area. Contact Shirley King, Flat 10A Parsons House, Claybrook Road, Hammersmith W6. Tel: 748 0551.

KINGSTON AREA new group forming. Phone Elinor 01-949 2596 evenings.

New women's liberation group meeting at the Community Centre, 161 Markhouse Rd, Walthamstow, London E17. Fridays 8 pm.

BLACK LESBIANS. We are trying to form a social group. Box 442.

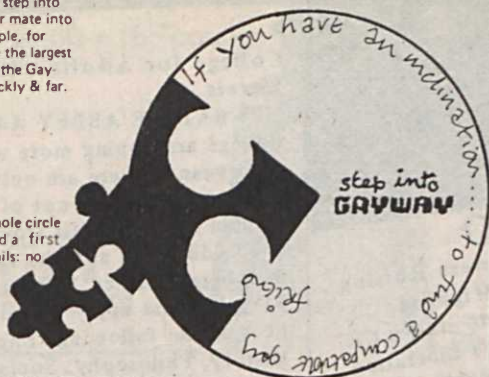
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Maternity Grants

It seems to me wrong that every woman as of right does not receive a maternity grant when her baby is born. It all depends upon National Insurance contributions, and if you or your husband do not have the correct contributions, no grant can be paid. If a woman is unemployed, is not married to the father of the child or is on SS she can make no claim. SS makes allowance for a new baby but is also very keen to discover the whereabouts of the father, which the woman may not wish to disclose.

Why does not every birth automatically qualify the mother for a grant? The ruling seems to hit hardest at the lower income level. No matter how well off you are, you qualify if stamp requirements are met. So why not however poor you are also?

Are there any women interested in trying to change this unfairness? I would like to hear from other women who have been unable to obtain a maternity grant.

Patricia Van Twest
69 Lower Redland Rd
Bristol BS6 6SP

★ *Maternity Grant: £25 if you or your husband have paid the right number of National Stamps for the contribution year.*

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For more details see *Women's Rights: A Practical Guide* by Coote and Gill, pages 80-82 (Penguin).

Consciousness Raising Group in Highgate

I am trying to start a CR type Women's Liberation group in Highgate Village, North London. I would be grateful if any interested women who live fairly locally (I have no transport) could contact me at Garden Flat 11 North Road Highgate London N6 or phone me at 340 2596
Many thanks
Josette Coburn-Morgan

College for Adults without 'O' or 'A' Levels

NEWBATTLE ABBEY Adult Residential College are hoping more women will apply next year as there are only 13 women students at present out of 65, and many women could benefit from obtaining a good education and the College's Diploma in Liberal Studies. Whether you are 21 or 51 you could apply to study for a course of 4 of the following: English Literature; History, Philosophy; Sociology; Political Theory; Government and Politics; Economics; Logic; Trade Union Studies.

Anyone interested should write to the Secretary, Newbattle Abbey College, Dalkeith, Midlothian, Scotland.

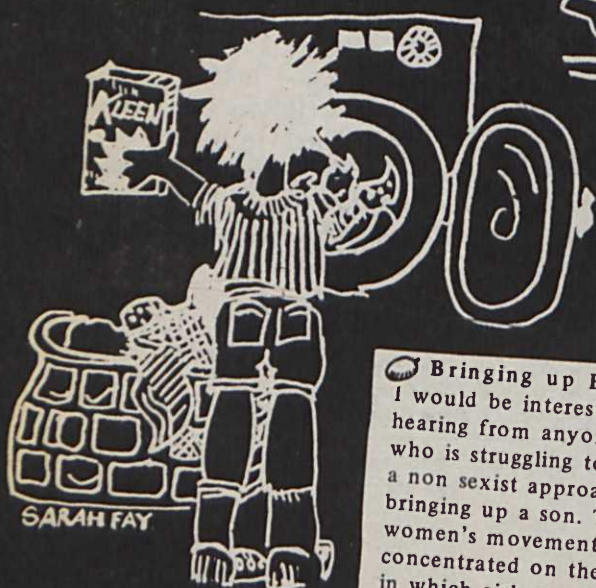
Mental Patients Experiences

I am writing on behalf of a group collecting experiences from mental patients on any aspects of their treatment, drugs, ECT, psychosurgery, therapy, etc., as well as legal aspects of treatment such as the workings of the Mental Health Act. We are particularly interested in hearing from anyone who has tried to process complaints in whatever way, and the reception they received.

Our group is one of several that arose out of a Manchester University Anti-Psychiatry conference held at the beginning of last year and comprises members of the Mental Patients Union, NCCL, etc.

We hope eventually to get something published but would of course treat individual contributions in strictest confidence.

Yours sincerely
Estelle Beninson
Manchester Mental Patients Union
2 York Avenue
Prestwich
Manchester M25 8FZ



SARAH FAY

Bringing up Boys

I would be interested in hearing from anyone else who is struggling to evolve a non sexist approach to bringing up a son. The women's movement has concentrated on the ways in which girls are brought up, which is surely only part of the problem of sexism.

Sisterhood
Jill Heenan
3 Fairfax Street
York YO1 1EB

Winchester Group

I wonder if any readers in the Winchester area would like to form a group to discuss *Spare Rib* and local issues affecting women?

If you are interested please contact Hilary Self, 21 St Catherine's Road, Winchester.
Yours sincerely
Hilary Self

Brighton Groups

Women's Only Group meeting of CHE (Campaign for Homosexual Equality) meets on the fourth Tuesday of every month at the Marlborough Hotel, Princes St, Brighton. (Upstairs lounge at 8.30 pm). All women welcome. For further information contact Su Spurway, WG Lambda, PO Box 449, Brighton BN1 1UU.

Brighton Lesbian Group meets at Flat 1, 9 St Michael's Place, Brighton. This group meets on the first, third and fifth (when there is one) Wednesday of every month. For information contact Lee at the above address.



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OPENING MYSELF TO CHANGE

The second of our series on help seeking is about psychotherapy. Some feminists forcefully dismiss psychotherapy, others defend it, saying we should "turn in to our own purposes".

But can the practice of therapy lead to more than adjustment and conformity? Frances Seton thinks it can. Assessing her own therapy, she describes why it can be used by women to change deeply rooted destructive patterns of relationships, and how she emerged from therapy more profoundly political.

This article has been very difficult to write. I have had to try and explain how psychotherapy, which has helped me enormously, can be justified as an option for women within a feminist perspective. This has meant not only describing my experience as a patient in therapy, but dealing with the anti-psychiatry arguments of feminists, radical psychiatrists and the friends who have helped me write this.

I have been in therapy with a woman psychotherapist for about eighteen months. Psychotherapy is one of the many forms of help available, along with psychoanalysis, co-counselling, encounter, psychodrama, to name but a few. Many people are confused about the distinction between these forms of help. In psychotherapy you visit a therapist once to three times a week for a fifty minute session when you sit and face your therapist, though some people choose to lie on a couch. Psychoanalysis differs in theory and in practice; you go five times a week for up to seven years and usually lie on the couch speaking to the analyst indirectly. Psychoanalysis is nearly always Freudian or Jungian while psychotherapy draws on many schools — Freudian, Jungian, Gestalt, Transactional and Behaviourist are the most common. Many therapists use a combination according to the needs of the patient. It is important to know about this and feel free to explore the kind of therapy and therapist you want.

I found my therapist through my University Health Service where the GP referred patients only after discussing

the individual's case with the staff therapists and selecting the most suitable combination.

Facing vulnerability

When I first started psychotherapy I encountered opposition and discouragement as well as support and understanding. The most immediate support came from friends who had been in therapy (I had initially got the idea from them) and from two close friends who had recently started themselves. It was really helpful to share this rather alarming process with others who were familiar with the jargon of patterns, syndromes and neuroses.

Other friends were frankly horrified or embarrassed by what seemed an admission on my part of a terrible disease, or deforming blemish.

We are all expected to cope, and not to admit failure, although I am sure many of us have sufficient pressures in our families, relationships and work to make it very difficult to function well. Unhappiness bordering on depression or intense anxiety is seen as shameful or as a kind of illness. It's repressed lest our admission of it threaten everyone else's precarious facades of coping. However, I must admit I did see my decision to go into therapy as an admission of weakness. I was ashamed that I could not work things out for myself or within the structure of a women's group.

By admitting my need for some sort of help I began to learn important things. In the first place I had always appeared to others as strong, productive

and together — a competence which was rather daunting. Once I was able to admit my own vulnerability to myself, many relationships became more equal. No longer did I always put myself into the unconsciously superior role of supporting others, instead we were able to share both our strengths and our weaknesses. I believe that women are conditioned into two conflicting roles; one tends to dominate and dictate the nature of relationships. There is the Big Mother role or the emotionally dependent Child. I had been trying to be the first and forcing close friends into the second. With my image of myself as a strong type, I experienced shame in having to admit need and dependence. We are all distorted (by the inherent contradictions) of these exclusive roles and a lot of work needs to be done to understand the way women relate to each other.

In the second place I learned that to seek help was not an admission of abject failure, but the first step towards taking responsibility for myself, and freeing myself (and others) from the tyranny of my past. It was a matter of coming to a realistic assessment of my capacities and recognizing my healthy need of others.

It requires strength to go through therapy and abandon all such defence mechanisms and behaviour patterns which had got me through in the past. Opening myself to change required an often painful process of self discovery. I had to come to terms with feelings from which I had hidden — like fear of abandonment and strong self-hate — as well as those I could not allow myself like happiness, the capacity to love others and myself, and the expression of my sexuality.

Feminists reject psychotherapy

I was afraid of asking for help because it felt like reverting to childlike dependence. It was a realistic fear in view of the traditional image of therapy in which the woman goes as a patient to an omniscient professional who will make her better.

Feminists have exposed the power structure in the patient-doctor relationship of psychoanalytic (Freudian) theory which is the basis of all other theories. The feminist critique is twofold: Psychoanalytic theory propounds the idea of femininity as biologically/psychologically determined. Women want to be mothers and wives, argue the theorists, thus maintaining the role of women as reproducers of the labour force, servicers of workers and children, by making women believe that this is all a healthy, normal female should desire.

"Therapy attempts to remove constrictions on the individual created by past experience, in order to make choice possible"

Secondly feminists have attacked the patriarchal character of a therapeutic situation in which a desperate woman goes to a male counsellor and enters into a dependent relationship which repeats their social, emotional and often economic dependence on fathers, husbands, boyfriends and bosses. In *Women and Madness* Phyllis Chesler not only exposes the actual sexual content of many therapeutic relationships, but also the use of class power by middle class white men and "men-women" who inflict treatment on working class, black and lesbian women. Thus the theory and practice of much psychological counselling seems to reflect the power relationships of patriarchal/class society.

Juliet Mitchell in *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* has tried to reassess the value of psychoanalytic theory. Instead of attacking Freud, as many other feminists have done, for being prescriptive, ie telling women how they ought to be, she argues that his theory of the unconscious and the Oedipus complex describe the precise mechanisms whereby individual males and females are socialised in to their respective roles within a patriarchal society.

She also exposes the inadequacies of the radical psychiatrists' arguments that it is the institutions of society which cause problems and that it is enough to attack them. One must also fully analyse the workings, origins and inter-relationships between the internal structure of the mind and external social structures. In a theoretical form she shows how the personal is political and how the material structure of social relations is rooted in the structure of personality.

To sum up — as I see it, in feminist and other radical critiques, psychology is seen to propound an idea of women that is false, oppressive and closely related to the maintenance of patriarchal society. But I don't think we necessarily have to be manipulated by psychology, we can use it for ourselves. The discovery of the unconscious and the recognition of how it can be manipulated paradoxically provides us with the means to escape from socially imposed structures and to work towards new ones. So we can reassess the value of psychological theory to some extent, and I would like to argue that feminist criticism of the practice can also be challenged.

Mother/daughter relationship restaged

In the light of the feminist condemnation of the whole process, how could I justify my choice to engage in personal therapy? In the first place the actual distress I felt was not at all relieved by the recognition that it had a social origin.

When I decided to do therapy I was depressed, withdrawn and sexually frigid. And although I'd tried very hard talking, thinking and reading about it, I could do absolutely nothing about it. At one point I had even managed to make a list of eight possible explanations, but I was absolutely trapped and controlled by something that I did not understand and could not alter.

I read all I could about psychology, which only provided me with a series of labels to describe my state and, more seriously, literally to hide behind. (A criticism I have of psychology and indeed medicine is that it gives problems a concrete existence separate from their origins.) Even when I read Karen Horney's *Feminine Psychology* which provided illuminating and basically feminist analyses of frigidity in the reproduction of the family structure in adult couple relationships, I did not find the means to solve those well documented problems that I was so intimately experiencing. But I did find a spurious comfort in describing my situation in terms of psychologically validated "problems". It was only when I went to a therapist with my neatly labelled "problems" that I discovered I could no longer hide behind them. The pain was real and the labels irrelevant. I had to react to my pain either with masochistic self pity or with a determination to change. I had to decide to go through to a new future or submit to the tyranny of my past and present.

My University Health Service GP was surprised when I specifically asked to see a women therapist. This was partly because I could not really talk to a man about sexual problems, and partly out of simplistic feminism. I had not really appreciated that within an essentially patriarchal institution, the presence of individual women do not necessarily, if at all effect the nature of the institution. However a female therapist was in fact helpful because an important source of my distress was an unresolved grief, anger and resentment at my mother's death which I saw as her abandoning me. In therapy I was making a relationship with an older woman, who was an authority figure in the situation, and on whom I felt dependent and needy. Through this I was able to exorcise the ghost of my real mother. I don't think this is important only for people whose mothers have died. In the family, the mother wields enormous power by virtue of her role as socialiser, sole nurturer, giver (and withholder) of love. Working with a woman therapist helped me to begin to break the power of the figure of The Mother that I had internalised.

The present replaces the past

How that came about is simple to explain but hard to understand without actually experiencing it. Basically the present replaces the past. My therapist avoids talking exclusively about my childhood because she feels that explaining the cause of particular feelings does not necessarily alter them, (and as I found out for myself, it sometimes does the opposite). But by emotionally recognizing that the way I feel and act today are programmed reactions set up in childhood, I have the possibility of changing how I feel and act now — of making new programmes.

For instance I reacted to my mother's death by totally suppressing my genuine reactions — I was brave, I coped remarkably well, while I really felt abandoned and rejected. And since I could not bring myself to blame her for abandoning me, I came to feel that it was my fault; I was unworthy of love or had done something to drive her away. Three patterns emerged: I was terrified to love anyone for fear that they would leave me, I clung desperately to my friends and lover by looking after them and winning love by being kind, and I took responsibility for anything that went wrong in any relationship. I was, therefore dependent in a covert way, manipulative and riddled with guilt.

I cannot isolate one dramatic moment that changed all this, but I came to trust my therapist. On a conscious level I was in a willed, self chosen relationship with someone I came to trust. Unconsciously I was transferring to her some of my feelings about my mother.

When, my therapist was ill and then almost killed in a car crash, I dealt with that virtual repeat of my past differently. I did not identify her potential demise as abandonment nor did I blame myself. Of course, she didn't in fact die, but had she died making some of the original feelings of guilt and abandonment emerge, they would have been exposed for my conscious recognition of their source and function. I realised that even someone on whom I felt very dependent did not have the power over me to damage me in the way my mother's disappearance had. Thus therapy has worked for me by virtue of the very fact that it restages the authoritarian structure of the family in which personality formation takes place.

Closer communication between conscious and unconscious

The only way that I can explain that process is by saying that I have come to accept the existence of the unconscious.▶

"My politics were an expression of my unresolved emotional obsession"

I knew about it intellectually but had never really experienced its effect. Moreover the idea of something over which I had no intellectual control was very threatening to me. All my education had taught me to be profoundly suspicious of such an irrational force as the unconscious. It took me a long time in therapy to stop myself from trying to "solve the problem", to forego my educated inclination to give the "right" answer. Analysis, explanation, understanding as rational activities do not touch the range of emotions that profoundly affect one's life and to some extent actually dictate one's intellectual outlook.

I see therapy as a means to bring the unconscious and conscious into closer communication by a twofold process. I describe the first as falling through layers to profounder levels of consciousness; the second as a floating up of the buried unconscious to the surface.

At the beginning of therapy I could not face the idea of making love to anyone — I had no sexual feelings at all. I responded so intellectually and "rationally" to the situation that I could objectify that paralysis of feeling as "frigidity". While many women argued that my "frigidity" was caused by X number of reasons in my living situation and past, their suggestions simply could not touch me. I was so out of touch with my feelings that the contradictions in my feelings could only manifest themselves to me by a specifically sexual block.

It is possible to unblock through a *structure* in which you have a time and place where you are committed to experience your feelings. But beyond that, the structured time and place serves as a focus for a *process* of recognizing, examining and living your feelings that should go on all the time. This basically means bringing the conscious and unconscious into closer communication. But the unconscious is beyond conscious control by definition and cannot be forced by either therapist or patient. Therapy only provides the opportunity to work things out for yourself. It does not work for everyone because patients can resist deliberately or unconsciously, often out of an unwillingness to change, or a desire for the therapist to confront their feelings for them.

Because the real area of change has to be in the relationship between the unconscious and the conscious, I do not believe that consciousness raising alone can or should provide the same opportunity for psychological change. I was doing consciousness raising for the first six months of my therapy. It was a very politicising process, one which I believe is crucial to the women's movement,

enabling women to discover the common patterns of being female in this society by sharing personal experience. Up to a point it can duplicate the *structure* of the therapeutic session — a place to explore feelings. But because of the group's democratic structure, it cannot reproduce the authoritarian nature of the family and society which I have argued is an essential part of the workings of therapy. Indeed the consciousness raising group valuably tries to counter it with a collective model. It applies none of the pressure necessary to shake up the unconscious, and does not provide one figure to whom you relate so strongly that, if you want to, you can change the deeply rooted unconscious patterns of relationships. It is essentially, and usefully, *consciousness* not *unconsciousness* raising.

Removing constrictions

A process of unconsciousness raising necessarily takes a long time. Therapy does not merely aim to analyse and relieve specific problems, but attempts to remove constrictions on the individual created by past experience, in order to make choice possible. My own therapy fell into two distinct phases. The first six months were goal-orientated and relieved my inability to function sexually. The second phase has been much longer and has made me think in terms of a *process* of permanent revolution that will continue beyond the end of structured therapy.

Having begun to trust the process, to understand the workings of the psyche and how to use the tools of therapy, I can continue to work at it on my own and apply it to a larger social sphere. It is not a matter of cure, there can be no complete cure within a sexist, capitalist society. To be happy is not to be cured but to be or want to be self determined v. patterned, autonomous v. dependent, to be able to make decisions v. being blocked, to accept vulnerability and needs v. false strength. And to be able to see oneself as separate and ultimately alone yet able to relate within society.

But this is impossible for men and women within our society because we are divided and categorised into masculine (strong, decisive, rational and competitive), and feminine (emotional, indecisive and dependent). Through psychotherapy I have begun to free myself from the crippling effects of my past and have gained the means to explore the kind of social relations through which human potential can be realized in our society.

I am not arguing for personal solutions — I'm alright, Jill — because I have been in therapy. I have found that the therapeutic process has given me a

greater appreciation of political issues and motivation. For example, I used to be a virulent man-hater and not surprisingly found myself attracted to radical feminism, with man as the main enemy. My politics were an expression of my unresolved emotional obsession. I am no longer a man-hater, but I still have radical feminist consciousness based within a socialist perspective. That is to say, I believe it is not men but the system of relations between men against women within and outside capitalism that oppresses women. Far from being depoliticised by therapy I have become more profoundly and constructively political. Moreover I inform my political views with a new understanding of the political importance of psychology.

Recently I joined a mixed therapy group which meets once a week for 90 minutes with about eight members and a leader, in order to explore the psychology in a specifically social situation. I am less convinced by this form of therapy because it does not fulfill any of the conditions I have discussed above. It is interesting to see what happens all the time in social interactions intensified and thrown into high relief. But it operates within the same limits I described in consciousness raising — and without the vital political perspective to inform it. Its structure is democratic (only superficially as there is still a leader) so transference or shake up of the unconscious cannot take place.

I have often been struck and frustrated by the fact that many of the issues raised are largely problems created by sexism and capitalism; the men's fear of failure, their competitiveness, their unease about their virility and their bonding; the women's passivity, concern about their roles and their ambivalence about men. But no effort is made in the group to integrate a political consciousness about social and psychological dimensions. Nor does the open structure generate enough pressure to enable individuals to change or equip them to fight. Group therapy can be interesting, informative and in some ways helpful, but I do not see it operating within the dynamic of the personal and political which I have been attempting to explain in this article.

Through the structure and process of psychotherapy I have been helped in resolving paralysing emotional problems. I have also learned to appreciate its value in examining the role of personality structure in political struggle. □

Frances Seton

I want to thank my friends in the women's movement who have helped me write this article but I take full responsibility for all the views expressed.



What exactly does the Sex Discrimination Act do for women? How can we make it work for us? A group of lawyers start to unravel the red tape and show how we can best organise around it.

Employment

When may discrimination in employment be lawful?

In private households, eg nannies, firms employing five or fewer people, and the Church. The Act also allows discrimination in selection of training for a job if sex is a "Genuine Occupational Qualification". For example, male models must be male, or if *privacy or decency require males or females*. After this it gets more vague. Beware of the employer advertising for a male lifeguard with occasional duties in the men's changing rooms. If these occasional duties are essential, although only part of the job, the employer is safe. To have any chance with your case you'd have to check whether there were already sufficient men working in the changing rooms. Get help from the others who work there, and from the NCCL women's rights office (see end of article for more details). Sex is accepted as a "Genuine Occupational Qualification" in the situations listed in the Act. Customers' preferences, expense, discomfort etc are not.

You say it is unlawful to discriminate against married people, what about single people?

This is a gap. The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against married people because they are married, but not against single people because they are single. Note that this kind of discrimination is only unlawful in the area of employment.

The Act makes it illegal to victimise someone in their work for taking action under the Sex Discrimination Act, or the Equal Pay Act. How can this possibly work?

It can't. Making it illegal to victimise people simply means that the victim may get a bit more compensation. The employer will happily pay a little over the odds to rid himself of a troublemaker. This will be especially true in non-unionised workplaces staffed by badly paid women.

When do I use the Equal Pay Act, and when do I use the Sex Discrimination Act?

The Equal Pay Act covers claims for the same job, or jobs rated similar under a job evalua-

tion scheme. It also covers "any provision for the payment of money" in your contract of employment. Everything else, including monetary fringe benefits, like cars or mortgages comes under the Sex Discrimination Act. In some cases you may need to use both Acts. For example, you want a mortgage. A job evaluation scheme has rated your job as similar to Mr X, a married man. He earns more than you do. Claim under the Equal Pay Act. You win. Mr X can get a cheap mortgage from the firm, you are a married woman and cannot. Claim under the Sex Discrimination Act. You win.

What is unlawful discrimination under the Sex Discrimination Act?

There are four categories of possible unlawful discrimination:

1 Treating a woman less favourably than a man would be treated in the same circumstances because of her sex.

2 Treating a man less favourably . . . because of his sex.

3 Treating a married person less favourably than a single person . . . because of her/his marital status.

4 Treating anyone less favourably . . . because she/he has taken action or been involved in an action under the Sex Discrimination Act.

Unlawful Discrimination is either direct or indirect. Direct means what it says, ie blatant. For example, you have two degrees, six years experience and good references. The man who gets the job is a school leaver with no A levels. Direct Discrimination, outside the areas listed as exempt in the Act, can NEVER be justified.

Indirect Discrimination means applying a particular test which puts one sex, or married people at a disadvantage. Even though the test may not have been designed to exclude women, if it has that effect, and is not justifiable in terms of the job's requirements, it is unlawful. For example. Only men who can lift heavy weights are employed by a firm as drivers. This is not justifiable if there is a mechanised loading system. The same applies if overqualifications are demanded like membership of a professional organisation which has few women members. Seek advice from your union, law centre or the NCCL before rushing off to court. The success of the Act will very much depend on cases being thoroughly prepared and carefully argued in court. Particularly as the burden of proof is on you to show that you have been discriminated against unjustifiably.

However, suppose that Mr X could have got a mortgage before the Act as a married man, but that now the Act is in force your firm only grants cheap mortgages to executives. You must show that executives are mainly men, and that other grades are mainly women. This is not lawful, unless your employer can justify it; (he'll find this very difficult as he's only restricted mortgages to executives since the coming into operation of the Act). If you succeed, Mr X, the married man in the similarly rated job to you, should be very grateful and will benefit from your hard work and persistence, as he has no legal redress under the Sex Discrimination Act.

Education

My 14 year old girl has been told that she cannot do engineering drawing at school, but her twin brother can. What should I do?

Where different facilities are offered to boys and girls in the same school the school governors are discriminating unlawfully. Where the boys and girls are in different schools it is the local education authority who is discriminating unlawfully. It's important to remember this, when you are bringing a claim in court, as you must complain against the right defendant. However, before you can bring any claim in court you must write to the Secretary of State for Education and allow him two months to reply.

Beyond this obvious discrimination in facilities, is it illegal for schools to use material that rigidly stereotypes women?

Only if it can be proved that this material puts girls at a disadvantage, are they discriminated against. In this field it is probably more useful to encourage teachers to use this material critically than to try to ban it. For ideas and contact with teachers looking into this, write to Teachers Against Sexism, c/o Lambeth Teachers Centre, Santley St, London SW4.

DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION

Goods, Services and Facilities

The Act covers the whole range of services offered to the general public or a section of the public by hotels, boarding houses, pubs and restaurants, banks, insurance companies, credit houses and HP firms; transport authorities and local authorities. The aim of the Act is to stop these organisations treating women differently from men, on the basis of general assumptions. For example a building society can no longer refuse a well-paid woman a mortgage on the grounds of her sex, but this will not make low paid women workers any more eligible for mortgages than they were before. And if a woman says that she is planning to have children, the building society is quite entitled to calculate the mortgage largely on her husband's income.

Are there any exceptions?

Yes. Private clubs, political parties, places where people need special care or attention, charities, voluntary organisations and competitive sports facilities (except horse racing). But it's only membership of these organisations and the services they provide that are automatically exempt.

My employer operates a pension scheme which I am not allowed to join, or only if I accept less favourable terms than the men. Is it illegal?

Not until April 1978; and then women must have equal access to private pension schemes only if their work is the same or broadly similar to a man's under the Equal Pay Act. Even so it's now the time to start collecting information on private pension schemes and to push your union to negotiate schemes that include women and part-time workers.

My newsagent has cards in his window advertising rooms for 'respectable working man'. Is this illegal?

The law is boringly complicated in this area. Briefly if the landlord lives on the premises and they are 'small', he is entitled to accommodate whoever he likes. But if you know of a large landlord who consistently discriminates against women, you should

contact the NCCL, who will put you in touch with local groups to assist in the preparation of the case.

Advertising

I frequently get annoyed at advertisements for girl receptionists, typists, Girl Fridays and waitresses. Surely they are now outlawed by the Act?

On the face of it they are all discriminatory and therefore illegal. They will, however, be perfectly lawful if they fall within one of the exceptions to the Act or where sex is a genuine occupational qualification for the job. For example, the employer in search of a waitress for his remote hotel may well argue that it is impracticable for the waitress to live anywhere except in the hotel, and that it is "unreasonable" to provide separate rooms, bathrooms, and toilets for both male and female staff. This clause in the genuine occupational qualification section of the Act is, however, meant only for genuinely remote places such as lighthouses and existing isolated construction sites.

Supposing an employer has allowed himself to be persuaded, say by a Union, to consider women for jobs which up until then had only been held by men. Can he argue that to advertise for women only would be discriminatory?

Employers are allowed to encourage women (or men) to apply or train for those jobs which in the past twelve months have been held by few, if any, women (or men). Advertisements for women would be lawful in this case, though remember, that if men also apply, an employer must give equal weight to all applicants.

What can I do about advertisements which I think are discriminatory?

You can only take legal action if you have been personally discriminated against; and so only the Equal Opportunities Commission can take action over illegal advertisements. But as the procedures are extraordinarily convoluted and ineffectual it would be more useful to collect together discriminatory advertisements in a particular industry or area, and then send these to the EOC to persuade them to conduct a formal investiga-

tion into, say the advertising and recruitment practices of that particular industry. Their address is Equal Opportunities Commission, Overseas House, Quay Street, Manchester M3 3HN.

What about advertisements that use women as sex objects, that are insulting or degrading? The Sex Discrimination Act does not legislate against sexist images. You would do better to contact AFFIRM (Alliance for Fair Images and Representation in Media) 40 Croftdown Road, London NW5 for action on this. (See info *Spare Rib* 43 for more details.)

What is the Equal Opportunities Commission supposed to do?

Although the EOC may help an individual with the presentation of her case to an industrial tribunal or county court, where it sees a question of principle involved, it is primarily a monitoring body. It has wide powers to initiate research and conduct investigations into any field, and at any level - private firm, group of companies, pattern of employment in a whole area. But it has limited resources. Unless it is fed a steady stream of well-collated information, we are likely to be left with little more than a structure for taking individual actions on our own behalf. We will find ourselves alone and divided in tribunals and courts, sandwiched between redundancy claims and landlord and tenant actions. □

This article is not a conclusive statement of the law. We have simply tried to select some of the more important aspects and omissions of the Sex Discrimination Act. If you are considering taking action, Patricia Hewitt's Rights For Women is an indispensable guide to the new legislation. It's available from the NCCL, 186 Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9DE for 65p. The NCCL's women's rights officer, Jean Coussins is very willing to be consulted on the advisability of actions to ensure that we win the cases that go to court; and to collate information and experiences, so as to be more effective in persuading the EOC to investigate further areas that remain unchanged by these Acts.

FREE PREGNANCY TESTS

Also advice on Abortion, Full Fertility Control, and Vasectomy. British Pregnancy Advisory Service is a non-profit making registered charitable trust. Telephone Birmingham (021) 643 1461 Brighton (0273) 509726 Chester (0244) 27113 Leeds (0532) 443861 Liverpool (051) 227 3721 London (01) 222 0985 Manchester (061) 236 7777 Sheffield (0742) 738326

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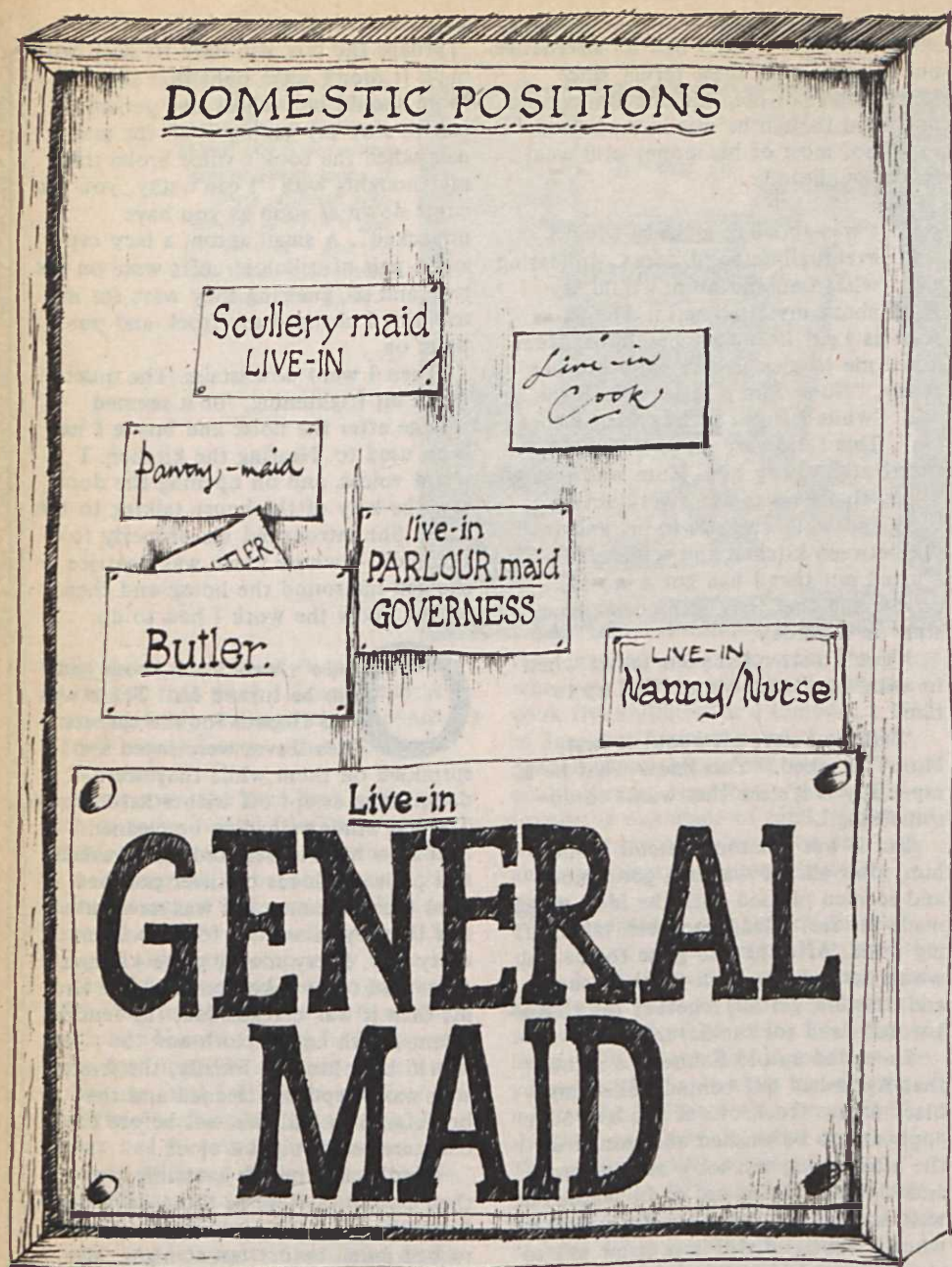


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IBM Typesetting by Caroline MacKechnie/Shirley Divers 105 Golborne Road, London W10 Telephone 01-969 5083 Good rates for feminist/alternative books, mags, pamphlets, etc. Illustration and paste-up too.



A little way past Marble Hill and almost opposite St. Stephen's Church in Twickenham there was a domestic agency whose window was always full of "wanted" cards. These were for cooks, "generals", parlourmaids, housemaids, kitchen maids, butlers, companions, nursemaids and married couples, all to live in. I had often stopped to read these cards, and now I made up my mind to go there and see if they could find me a job. Making myself as respectable-looking as possible in the old mauve astrakhan coat my aunt had given me while I was still at school, a woollen tam-o'-shanter borrowed from my sister Aggie, and nice clean shoes, I set off for the agency without telling Mum what I had in mind.

Feeling nervous but determined, I approached the building and with no hesitation knocked on the door; but I was in such a hurry to knock that I had not noticed the sign saying "Please Walk In". My heart was thumping and butterflies were chasing each other in my tummy, but I went in and sat down on one of the hard chairs which were arranged round the walls. Before long, I heard footsteps nearing the room and a very severe-looking lady put her head round the door and said, "Will you come this way?" She led me across a passage to another room.

"Good morning. Sit down", said the person sitting behind the desk. With its large blotting pad and wooden inkstand, the desk looked to me just like the one my headmistress used to have.

"What can I do for you?" she asked, not looking quite so severe as the lady who had shown me into the room.

"I'm looking for a job to sleep in", I replied in little more than a whisper.

Opening a big writing book — which I later learned was called a ledger — she proceeded to ask my name, address and age, writing them down as I told her.

She asked me what school I had attended and where I had worked; these, she said, were for her to contact about references. She pulled a box of cards towards her, sorted them over and after some hesitation picked one out. "There's something here that might suit you", she said, "I'll telephone the lady and find out". She did this, and then she looked across the desk at me as I sat there dying to know what had been said, and asked if I would go and see a lady who lived near Richmond Hill and who wanted a "general" to start as soon as possible. She informed me that if I took the situation I should have to pay her a fee of two shillings and sixpence. This was unexpected, but I agreed, thinking it would be worth that to get a job. By the time I left the agency, it was twelve-thirty and my appointment was for two o'clock. I had no dinner, but there was not enough time to go home. ▶

When Minnie Cowley retired, she wrote a detailed account of her childhood from 1910 to 1923. Her daughter Annette Kuhn, who had always been fascinated by her mother's stories, sent an extract to Spare Rib saying: "I should very much like other people to have the opportunity to look at it, and I think that there are sections which are particularly interesting as regards the history of women's — and especially working class women's — socialisation, education and labour during the early years of this century. I'm sending you the section on my mother's experiences in domestic service, which was still one of the main sectors of employment for working class girls immediately after the First World War — although it is clear that service was very much disliked." Minnie Cowley's father was a plasterer. Her parents, with their seven children, lived in Richmond. The extract opens with Minnie, aged 13 and unable to find a job in a shop or factory, visiting a domestic employment agency.

I found the road and the house I wanted quite easily, and with the time I had to spare weighed up the place in which I might be staying. It looked massive. There was a bay window on each side of the front door, more big windows on the first floor and an attic window high up in the roof. My sister had told me that servants slept either in the basement or the attic, and as there was no basement in this house, I realised that if I did get the job I should have to sleep right up there.

Feeling as if I were going to my doom, I walked up to the house, lifted the fancy latch of the front gate, stepped up the tiled pathway and banged twice on the door. I did not have to wait long before the door was opened by a woman with staring blue eyes.

"Yes, what do you want?" she said, eyeing me up and down.

"I'm from the agency and I have to see this lady at two o'clock", I said, handing her the letter I had been given.

"You should have gone round the side", she said, "That's the servants' entrance. But you'd better come this way now. I'll tell madam you're here". Opening the door wider, she made room for me to step into the red-carpeted hall, where just ahead of me I noticed a grandfather clock with a round pendulum swinging back and forth. The "Hickory, Dickory, Dock" nursery rhyme went through my mind. I was shown into a room and told to wait there "while I tell the mistress you're here". On each side of the fireplace was a brown leather armchair studded with buttons of the same colour. The sides of the fireplace and the hearth were tiled in green, and I hoped I could make the tiles as shiny as they were at that moment. The fireplace and overmantel were white, and in the middle of the mantelpiece stood a marble clock which, with its pillars, looked like the front of a building. At each end was a small statue. How different this was to our mantelpiece at home, which was always covered with odds and ends. Having taken note of my surroundings, I was just looking at the clock again to check the time when Madam came in, and right then I felt hungry and scared. The interview was not too bad, though. She asked me where I lived, what my Dad worked at, how I had done at school, and where she could apply for references. This was Thursday and she wanted me to start on Saturday: she was sure, she said, that my references would be satisfactory. The household consisted of master, mistress, companion, a boy of about four years old named Peter, and the cook.

I accepted gratefully, telling her I had one morning apron and a frock that could be worn in the afternoons. She offered to buy a morning frock and apron, two afternoon aprons and two caps, saying I could pay for them at two shillings and sixpence out of my wages. Maids were usually paid monthly but, like Aggie had done, I asked to be paid weekly, and here my wages were to be

seven-and-six a week. I had no alternative but to agree with these terms, since Mum could not help me and Dad would not, even though he was in a position to do so: most of his money still went to the publican.

It was about four-thirty when I eventually arrived home, wondering what Dad and Mum would say about my sleeping in. Almost as soon as I got in the kitchen door, Mum asked me to pick up my baby brother Harry. "Nurse him a little while", she said, "while I finish getting your father's tea". This I did very gingerly, scared that I might drop him. Mum was always saying that he was not a very strong baby and while she was to-ing and fro-ing between kitchen and scullery, I blurted out that I had got a job in service and that they wanted me to start on Saturday.

"You'd better tell your father when he comes in," said Mum. "It's up to him".

"Will you start off about it first, Mum?" I asked. "You know what he is, especially if it's me that wants to do something".

But it was not too difficult telling him, after all. He was in a good mood and seemed pleased with the idea, which made me feel a load had been taken off my mind. After he had gone to the pub we scrounged round all the cupboards and drawers, getting together the things I would need for the Saturday.

I mended an old flannelette nightie that Aggie had left behind, raked my black alpaca frock out of the bedroom cupboard to be washed and ironed for the afternoons, and took off the vest and bloomers I had on, to be washed as well, so that I could wear clean clothes when I went and still have some left to change into.

On the Saturday morning, I took a penny bus ride to Richmond Bridge and walked up the Hill. I arrived at the house earlier than arranged, and this time did the right thing by going in at the tradesman's entrance and knocking at the side door, which was opened by the cook.

"Come in", she said, "I'm rather busy now, but I'll show you to your bedroom, then you can come down when you're ready".

Through the kitchen, the hall, then up the carpeted stairs she led me, passing four doors on the first landing; then up another flight of stairs, which this time were covered with lino. There were only two doors leading off the second landing. One of these the cook opened and told me this was where I should sleep. The room next door, she added, was locked and full of things belonging to the people who owned the house. The first thing I noticed about my room was the sloping ceiling: the attic, I thought, just as Aggie had told me. I had never had so much space all to myself, and certainly nothing as posh as this.

"This must be a mistake", I thought.

"Perhaps the boy will have to sleep with me". It didn't seem right that this big room should be for just one person. I had to stop my gaping at all the grandness when the cook's voice broke into my thoughts with "I can't stay, you can come down as soon as you have unpacked". A small apron, a lacy cap and a pair of celluloid cuffs were on the bed, and so, guessing they were for me to wear, I changed my frock and put them on.

Then I went downstairs. The quiet was a bit frightening, for it seemed strange after the noise and bustle I had been used to. Nearing the kitchen, I heard voices, and on opening the door saw the lady of the house talking to the cook. She introduced me properly to the cook — whose name was Beatrice — showed me round the house and then let me know the work I had to do.

Once a week each room had to be turned out. There was no Hoover for the carpets: tea leaves were saved and sprinkled on them while they were damp, then swept off with a hard broom. The big windows had to be cleaned, fireplaces blackleaded and tiles washed and polished, loads of silver polished — even though some of it was never used — and the boy taken out for two hours every day. Every morning the kitchen range had to be raked out and the fire lit; then it was blackleaded, the fender cleaned with emery cloth and the hearth hearthtomed. Finally, the front step was swept and cleaned and the breakfast laid. All this was before the cook arrived at eight o'clock.

Middle-class people certainly had their pound of flesh in those days. Up at six-thirty in the morning, I never got to bed much before ten at night. My time off was Wednesdays from 3 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. and on one Sunday in every month after the midday dinner. A good fifteen hours a day at the ready all the time: it was not good by present day standards, but I still think there is something in the old saying that hard work never killed anybody.

The bill for my uniform came to 15/11½d, a little over two weeks' wages.

2 afternoon aprons	3 11½
@ 1/11¾d	
2 afternoon caps	2 1½
@ 1/0¾d	
1 morning frock	6 11
@ 6/11d	
1 morning apron	2 11¾
@ 2/11¾d	
Total:	15 11¾

The mistress deducted two-and-six out of my first week's wages and asked if I would like her to send the two-and-six fee to the agency at the same time as she sent hers. Whether this was to make sure I paid it, or whether she was

"Up at 6.30 . . . The big windows had to be cleaned, fireplaces black-leaded and tiles washed and polished, loads of silver polished even though some of it was never used — and the boy taken out for two hours every day."



really doing me a good turn I never knew, but that week I drew the large amount of two shillings and sixpence for a good ninety hours, either working or at the ready.

There may not have been slavery as such in those "Good Old Days", but for those fourteen-year-olds who were unlucky enough to become "generals" in the homes of lower-middle-class or jumped-up working-class families, this was just about one step away from it.

Sleeping alone was very frightening. I felt very lonely and would have given anything to wake up and find my sisters there with me. The smallest noise disturbed me, and I would lie awake for a long time, waiting and wondering. A climax had to come: I was so worked up and frightened when I went to bed, especially as my room was so far up. Then there was the locked room next door — my imagination ran wild about what or who might be in there. A witch? A man being kept prisoner?

One night I was wakened soon after I had finally got to sleep by what sounded like a terrific explosion. Before the echo had faded away, I was out of bed and down the stairs. I dashed pell-mell into the drawing-room without even a thought of knocking and cried out hysterically, "The Germans are here, they're shooting guns in the road!" The mistress sat me on a chair and told me not to be silly, the war had been over a long time and I should go back to bed. She led me into the kitchen and gave me a cup of coffee from the pot they had finished with. I did not know it then, but coffee was the very worst thing to give to anybody for inducing sleep. It took me much longer to get back upstairs than it had done to come down them, and before getting into bed I knelt down and said my prayers, something I had not done for a long time. Then I got between the sheets and cried myself to sleep.

While I was working at this house, the cook sold Mum two wicker arm-chairs, padded round the sides and covered in cretonne patterned with large red roses. I remember them well:

they creaked enough to wake the house whenever they were sat in. I gave the cook five shillings for a kimono, a kind of Japanese dressing gown. I really needed other things first but just couldn't resist that lovely piece of luxury: it was made of crinkly material, had a pattern of a dragon on the back and wide sleeves trimmed in white.

I eventually left the job in the house on Richmond Hill, or rather I got the sack. I must admit that what I did to cause my dismissal was silly. Instead of taking Peter for his usual walk, I took him home to see my young brother, and when he told the mistress he had been to where I lived, she gave me a week's notice on the spot. The trouble was that while he was playing in the field at the back of our house, he fell and cut his knee and had to have it bandaged with a piece of white rag. And to make things worse, he messed up his jacket. I told Mum about it when I went home on my next half day, and she said, "Who the devil does she think she is? If he grows up half as strong as you lot, she won't have much to worry about. Playing in a bit of dirt never hurt anyone — he's got to eat a peck before he dies".

I did not particularly want a sleeping-in job again, but there was no other work to be had and I could not stay at home out of work expecting Dad to keep me. And so I went into service again, hating it as much as ever. This time I was to be a general help in the kitchen of Roehampton Hospital, where wounded soldiers from the war were being looked after. I thought I would not be quite so nervous as before as there were a lot of people about. Everything there seemed so big — the huge cooking ranges, shelves full of the biggest saucepans I had ever seen, long passages and a large dining hall where the staff and nurses ate. I was more scullery maid than anything else. After every meal, it fell to my lot to clean a vast amount of pots and pans, some of them great big saucepans that I could hardly lift. It was not this that got me

down, though, in spite of the wet belly I got with all that washing up.

No, the end of my short stay at Roehampton Hospital came when one of the men who worked in the kitchen told me to go along with him. He led me down a dark passage with doors on each side, opened one of these doors and said, "In here". I caught sight of sacks of potatoes and greens and wooden crates stacked by the wall. Pointing to a corner where there was a pile of rhubarb tied up in bundles, the man told me I was to cut them all up into pieces. He took a knife out of the table drawer and showed me what the size of the pieces should be.

"Now you get that done, then come back to the kitchen", he said closing the door with a bang. It sounded to me as if a key had been turned in the lock. I looked at the rhubarb, then at the pointed knife lying on the table, and from there my eyes wandered round the room and came to rest on a window which had bars outside.

"What have they put me in here for?" I wondered. "Am I a prisoner? What's going to happen? Is someone coming to kill me?" For what seemed ages I was unable to move, then I headed straight for the door. To my relief, I found it was not locked. I opened it quietly and looked out, trying hard to remember which way I had come in, then crept along the passage, my heart thumping fit to burst at each door I passed. I found my way to the room in which I slept without meeting anyone who worked in the kitchen, threw my few belongings into my old wicker case without even tying it up, crammed on my hat and pulled on my coat, then made my way — still wearing the apron I had been working in — down the back stairs.

So there was I, all alone in Roehampton, a long way from home, without a penny in my pocket. I had been there one week that day, but the thought of asking for my wages had not occurred to me. In any case, they would have expected me to work a week's notice and that was the last thing I would have done. I sat on a seat in a nearby park, opened my case, found the string, put the lid back on and tied it up.

I walked through Putney, Sheen, Mortlake, Richmond, then over the bridge to dear old St. Margarets. I just kept walking without a stop, the case getting heavier the further I went. I arrived home tired, hungry, with very sore feet, and fortunately before Dad came home from work. I told Mum what had happened, and she said I should not have run away like that: they might be worried about what had gone wrong.

"You go up to bed. Your father will be in presently, I'll tell him you left because you don't feel well". So that was the end of that job, and no enquiry was ever made from the Hospital. □

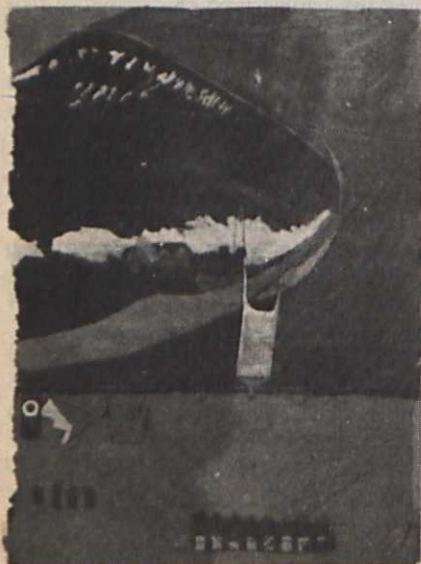
From an account of the childhood of Minnie Cowley.



Above, 'Two Women' mixed media by Wendy Holmes
Images of women, questioning the commercial idealised body.
"The first hurdle to cross is the gaining of respect and acceptance of your feelings towards your own work."



Below, 'Sandcastle' by Wendy Holmes
Contrasting luscious magazine image with boyishness of the adolescent girl (figure in white vest).
"At college I was accused of having sexual problems and masturbating through my work."



time



Below, 'Untitled' acrylic on canvas by Mary Crockett
"I found myself working in ways I know and getting into a stylization when I first left college. Now I am building up a bit more confidence and finding that the lack of audience has made me explore more recklessly and personally, and what I put in seems to give me back a lot more."



Above, 'Untitled' acrylic on canvas by Mary Crockett
"An entrenchment of ideas sets in when I have so little contact with fellow artists. Art magazines and most galleries simply frustrate my need for communication because they seem removed from the ideas and the actuality I'm attempting to describe."

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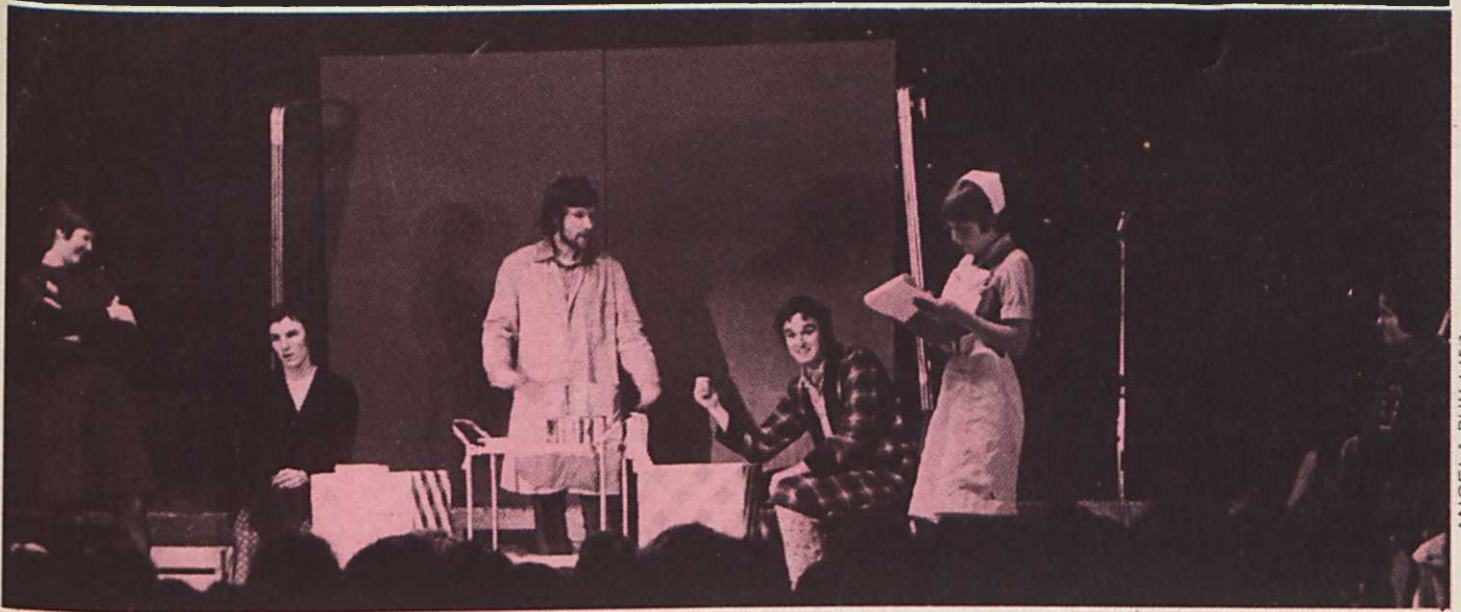
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ANGELA PHILLIPS

THEATRE

IT MAKES YOU SICK Red Ladder Theatre Group

On Friday December 5th, Red Ladder theatre group premiered their new play on the National Health Service, *It Makes You Sick*, to a huge and appreciative audience at St Pancras Town Hall, London. Some lovely music, a few excellent songs, plenty of good jokes. Readers in the north will be glad to know that Red Ladder have moved to Leeds, and are planning to tour the play there, primarily to audiences in the labour movement.

The context of the play is therefore the present government cutbacks on health and social services spending, and the play's emphasis is on the wage struggles being fought by hospital workers. We follow a factory worker, a staunch union member, injured at work and taken into hospital. There he gradually understands the need for solidarity amongst

hospital workers, and between them and the rest of the labour movement – even when that means the orderly refusing to serve his meals as part of a go-slow. He emerges from hospital to face the loss of his job.

This was interwoven with cameos around other areas of the NHS: the overworked GP dishing out Valium like Smarties; the slimy consultant chatting up his private patients; the nurse full of the ideology of caring and self-sacrifice that stopped her becoming militant; the male and female orderlies who are initially treated as the most radical because they're at the bottom of the hospital hierarchy; the patient's hard-worked and depressed wife.

Given all this material, the show was not overlong. Its ideas handled with an impressive professionalism and slickness, were put across with some lovely visual images and gags, some both funny and moving songs. Yet, coming away from it, having laughed a lot and not been bored for a

single second, I felt dissatisfied finally. I believe that trades unions are important, but felt that the play fell down by holding out as its final message the imperative of organizing through trades unions. What about all the people who are aren't in a union and can't be, women working at home for instance, the chronically sick or handicapped, or old people? Is there no way they can struggle too, as consumers of the NHS? Unions exist mainly to fight economic battles on behalf of their members – I believe it was a mistake to collapse all the levels of what goes on in the NHS back into a single one finally: the economic. The political struggle to revolutionise the health service must include other levels than simply economic ones. Of course wage struggles are crucial, but they must be transformed through an understanding of what was only really hinted at in the play: the racism and sexism implicit to the hospital power structure: workers' feelings as well as their wage

packets; depression being more than simply a con trick by the ruling class; the particular problems women face as gynaecology patients. If the labour movement is encouraged not to look at these aspects of the struggle but only at the economic one, then socialism will remain a dream and the bourgeois split in thinking between all the facets of our existence will be maintained.

Two last feminist quibbles: did it have to seem as though the nurse only became radicalized through her ambiguous relationship with the militant but sexist male orderly? and why did the men get all the best jokes while the women were portrayed as certainly in struggle but pretty grim with it? Some more searing, black, side-splitting feminist jokes in your next play, please, Red Ladder!

Michele Roberts



Mr X and Mr Right's home life

STOP PRESS

Gay Sweatshop, "a group of openly gay people who have formed a professional theatre company", are performing three lunchtime plays at the ICA, London, from February 24. Each play runs for three weeks with an informal discussion every day.

Mr X, which has already been on tour, is about the isolation and illusions caused by self-oppression. It's touching and witty – there's a beautiful scene that shatters the dreams of romantic love. Yet, though oppressed, gay and struggling, Mr X doesn't feel a need to change much beyond "coming out". He remains a man who despises women. *Any Woman Can* is about a lesbian's encounters and relationships with other women. Performed only once before, in the Women's Season at the Haymarket Theatre, Leicester, *Any Woman Can* is sincere and evocative, gutty and rousing.

Rose Ades

YOBBO NOWT by John McGrath, done by 7:84.

At the core of this play is a strong story: Marie, in her thirties, with two practically grown-up children, becomes dissatisfied with her humdrum housewifery and her husband's leering after schoolgirls. The two of them, for quite different reasons, decide to separate, and while he trots off to conquer the waves in every port, she copes alone. Despite a struggle – to get Social Security, to get a job, she is presented to us as a woman who chooses to live independent of a man.

There are some perceptively observed moments – a wildly funny caricature of a Social Security interviewer, the son's male-conditioned tendency to make a Mr Universe project out of everything, including making toast. The political dimension to the story is more uncertain; Marie takes up a hobby – investigating the capita-

list system, and some glib Aunt Sallies are set up in agitprop style which ring hollow. Apart from that, the play is about a third too long, including the music, even though individual songs are very good.

Micheline Wandor

FILM

TAKE IT LIKE A MAN, MA'AM!

Directed by Mette Knudsen, Elisabeth Rygaard and Li Vilstrup, the Red Sisters Collective
Produced in Denmark 1974/5, shown at the London Film Festival in December
English subtitles

A truly excellent film about women, by women. It centres on the predicament of a 50-year-old housewife who finds herself on society's slag heap; it doesn't only deal with the situation of older women — it comments on the position of women at all ages — although it is perhaps the first filmed attempt to analyse why older women are almost wholly absent from the women's movement.

Mette, Elisabeth and Li (all three of them in their late 20s/early 30s) began talking about the problem at the women's camp on the island of Femø in 1972, relating it to the experience of their own mothers. Older women's lives are much more rigidly determined by their sexual and socio-economic position and it is an extremely painful process to even start thinking about this web — never mind breaking out of it.

Ellen Rasmussen, the main character in the film, attempts to try and make her husband understand why she is bored out of her mind, now her children have grown up, and she has nothing to occupy her except the same housework day in, day out. She soon finds that no organisations exist to help her train to do something she sees as useful and break her isolation from society. Even when she gets some sort of training, nobody wants to employ her.

Perhaps the best part, and certainly the funniest, is when Ellen goes into a dream and imagines what life would have been like had the roles been reversed — a device also used by Francine Winham in her film *Put Yourself in My Place*. It is extremely educational as well as entertaining. There's the (female) consultant at the hospital with a gaggle of junior doctors in tow, pinching the (male) nurse's bum; the (male) secretaries in the typing pool powdering their noses and watching the clock impatient to get to the shops before they close

— images which illustrate how ridiculous and intolerable is women's position.

Unlike most full length films commenting on women's position, e.g. *Family Life*, *Cathy Come Home*, which are extremely depressing, this film ends on a positive note without being simplistic

Jenny Rathbone

At the moment this film has no distributor in Britain, although several, including the Other Cinema, are interested. The Danish distributor is: Afa, Lindergarden, G1 Tollose, DK 4340 Tollose, Denmark.

BOOKS for children

THE BOYS COOK BOOK

by Christine McPherson (Hamish Hamilton £2.75)

COOKING IS A GAME YOU CAN EAT

by Fay Maschler illustrated by Malcolm Bird

(Kestrel £1.95, Puffin 50p)

PICTURE COOK BOOK

by Sarah Freeman illustrated by Maggie Read (Piccolo 50p)

THOMAS BAKES A CAKE

by Gunilla Wolde translated by Alison Winn (Brockhampton Press 45p)

One of the problems that confronts us in the breaking down of sex-roles is that boys who enjoy domestic tasks like cooking rarely find this shown as a normal male activity in children's books or other media. So it is particularly hopeful to see three new cookery books on the market all making a special feature of cooking for boys.

The Boys Cook Book has been written by a teacher who had had practical experience of all the recipes included. She has written about lots of cheap dishes, has a very useful page on safety, and (absolutely essential for beginners) included a glossary. Never patronising in her writing, she doesn't start out with the notion that boys need any special treatment in the kitchen. One or two of the dishes sound a bit extravagant though, in view of the current cost of food.

Cooking is a game you can eat is for "good eaters of 5+ with some help, and 8+ when experimenting mainly on their own". This is the most useful and comprehensive of the three books, with sections on indoor, outdoor and left-over cooking: good value at 50p for the paperback version.

These three books will be especially useful for youth projects and schools trying to interest boys in cooking. The illustrations show both girls and boys cooking and being cooked for. Sexism does creep into the text though when Maschler assumes that the only adult who uses the kitchen is Mum.

For younger children, *Picture Cook Book* is beautifully illustrated with its recurring image of a boy in a striped apron. It is the sort of book that will make children shout for joy — and dentists and nutritionists groan. Recipes range from Knickerbocker Glory and ice cream soda, to chocolate crunchies.

A red border round a page instead of a blue one is an attractive way to indicate that an older person is needed to help with using the oven. The very straightforward recipes make a glossary unnecessary — but perhaps Freeman could have explained just how to 'knead'.

For the very young a book that has been around for some time is *Thomas Bakes a Cake*. Not strictly a cookery book, although it offers a recipe, it shows young Thomas mixing the ingredients, baking, and then sharing his cake. Dad helps by lighting the oven.

Jo Spence
Children's Rights Workshop



BOOKS

Daughters Inc. is an American publishing company who were founded in 1972 to produce books by women. Here we have reviewed six of their novels now available in Britain.



RUBYFRUIT JUNGLE by Rita Mae Brown

"When I make love to women I think of their genitals as a ruby fruit jungle."

"A ruby fruit jungle?"

"Yeah, women are thick and rich and full of hidden treasures and besides that, they taste good."

"That's hardly a fantasy. You have an extremely immature sex life, Molly. No wonder you're a lesbian."

Molly is lesbian, illegitimate and clever — all labels stuck on her while she's still at school. This book's about learning to live with the labels without giving in to them. It's funny, moving, compulsive reading. My only doubt about it is that Molly is strong without a movement, successful without a struggle — she doesn't try to be best at school, it comes naturally. She's a bit too superwoman, like in some American feminist books for children where there's a super-tough girl instead of a super-tough boy — a different winner in the same framework. But you accept this on first reading, or I did. Being bravest and best at everything is just another way in which Molly is different, another way it's not acceptable for women to be. At high school she wants a candy apple red Triumph but her cousin Leroy says she can't, it's too confusing for him:

"If you're doing what you please, out there riding around on motorcycles, then what am I supposed to do? I mean how do I know how to act if you act the same way?"

Anyway, she doesn't win in the end. She goes to film school and comes out top with a film of her mother speeding away in a rocking chair and being herself, while all the male students have made Martian gang rapes. But she still can't get a job. She hasn't smashed sex and class barriers. The book's not triumphalist.

One reason given for her effortless understanding is that she can see straight through heterosexual propaganda. Because she's gay there's no way she can be conned by the ads on the tube. Or by the morality and lies laid on her by teachers and psychiatrists when it comes out at college that she's spent all term

in bed with her room-mate, emerging only for classes and meals.

She does suffer then and has to struggle to maintain her defiance. I suppose I think of the book as carefree because of all the racy, colourful scenes — Molly filling a raison box with rabbit turds and watching an enemy eat them; Molly playing the Virgin Mary and shoving Joseph off the stage. The book says a lot about the contradictions of being gay in this society, but it's this energy and speed that make it so exciting to read.

Jill Nicholls



THE COOK AND THE CARPENTER by the Carpenter

The Cook and the Carpenter is a radical feminist novel from the North American women's movement. It's about a group of people, adults and children, who've moved into a small Texas town to live collectively. They want to make contact with the community, and to be a force for revolutionary change. They want to share with their neighbours their ideas on child care, health care, sex, class, race, and gay oppression. The novel describes the difficulties the collective has relating to the rigid perceptions of their Texan neighbours, open only to "each one's own class, race, sex, national and business equal".

The carpenter, who writes the story, says that since the differences between men and women are transparent to all, it's not necessary to distinguish between men and women. Therefore the carpenter uses 'na' for all personal pronouns. Presumably this is to make readers examine their own assumptions about what constitutes male and female behaviour.

There are several clear statements of the political goals of the collective — "to set up a counter-life and work for revolution; the two are halves of the same whole and what is absolutely essential is to keep juggling them. If we concentrate on either one and forget the other we produce a monster". Even so, when I first read this novel I definitely didn't like it. Like others who've read it, I was irritated by the continuously jarring effect of na this and na that. I was irritated by what seemed over-lyrical and metaphorical writing.

When I read it a second time I changed my mind. Mostly I was impressed by the insight of the carpenter's descriptions of emotional interactions. For example, the tensions created in political work —

"... one person doing other people's share of the work is always demoralising and sometimes a way of making oneself indispensable in order to gain power."

"The carpenter had once wanted that [to have influence] and even now experienced as a kiss the cook's admiration when na spoke of non lover's influence. But the chill followed so fast that the kiss was cold before it reached the brain: the carpenter knew that to be followed was a prerequisite to being dumped and na wanted more than anything to belong."

"[Na] hated Three for leaving [na] — a member of the group, one [person] equal among many, vulnerable on all sides to friendship, requests for response, vague but ever present possibilities of relationships with no guidelines of love; left [na] an object among objects to make [nan] own way with no escape to a bed; left the days filled with people no more or less special than [nasef]."

(I have preserved the carpenter's use of 'na' in quoting from this final section so as not to give the game away.)

Lynne Segal

EARLY LOSSES by Pat Burch



Frieda, a good, fat Catholic girl, lives a comfortable, isolated existence in Philadelphia with her weak, loving, widowed mother. Her pleasures are eating, shopping and reading romances. Her only manifestation of discontent is a constant exhaustion. In *Early Losses* she leaves home for university. Dressed in "tight fitting leopard skin dacton and bright red lipstick" she comes up against the faded jeans culture where people don't go to church every Sunday or enjoy working for A grades.

Frieda suffers — "she sat in one spot all evening, her legs stretched out in front of her to make them look thinner" — but she doesn't suffer unduly. The book edges beyond revealing shared oppression. Frieda loses her fat, her faith and her virginity with an extraordinary, guiltless ease.

The book would lack credibility were it not for the flawless consistency of Frieda's character. Underneath the self-deprecating feelings forced on fat girls, she has a solid core of confidence. The confidence of one whose mother has treated her daughter as an equal and shown an unshakeable belief in her daughter's abilities.

Frieda has neither father nor brothers to compete with for her mother's love, and feels she can control her own life just as she controls her mother. Moreover, because she has a good memory she does well at school which further builds her belief in herself.

Isolated in Philadelphia she develops her own values and a certainty which stands her in good

WOMEN & WORK A DOCUMENT ON THE DIVISION OF LABOUR IN INDUSTRY

By Kay Hunt: Mary Kelly:
Margaret Harrison

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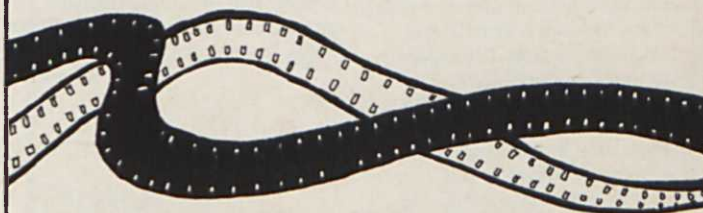
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stead when she goes to university. There she is perceptive enough to pick up what she can use, to adapt when she wants to, and secure enough not to compete or lose sight of her own aims and objectives.

Pat Burch tells Frieda's story with wry humour and an eye for archetypal situations. For example, early in the book she accurately describes the mixed pleasure and self hatred of three fat women eating together to the chorus of "I'll start my diet on Monday."

Rosie Parker



THE TREASURE by Selma Lagerlöf

A young girl must choose between betraying the man she loves or betraying the memory of those he has murdered. This quietly affecting fable of a Swedish orphan's dilemma takes shape in Nobel Prizewinner Selma Lagerlöf's gentle prose. And though separated by two continents and more than 50 years, Lagerlöf's imagery recalls Emily Dickinson's metaphorical intimacy with death; its sudden chill, its rush of blood, its lonely fascination, and its dreamlike life.

Elsalil is haunted by her murdered foster sister, whose icy hands terrorise the living and whose fair hair is mistaken for a sunbeam. Following the blood of her dead sister's footsteps through the snow, Elsalil tussles with her anguish at her foster family's unquiet grave and her attraction for the elusive cavalier who has killed for a casket of silver. She chooses death. She drives a pike into her heart in order to hinder the murderer's escape.

Daughters Inc's airy-fairy introduction calls this sombre tale of pain and magic "an allegory of sisterhood itself" because all the women of the village come out to retrieve and mourn Elsalil. I find this attempt at feminist appropriation of personal despair completely inappropriate. The story itself exalts the moral purity of the aching girl who renounces love.

The introduction also mindlessly elevates women's domestic and social skills (listening for omens, laying out the dead) above their men's undignified concern with silver coins, and thus suggests a superior, almost innocent 'women's consciousness' which is *not* explicit or even apparent in the lives the villagers lead.

It follows, then, that Daughters Inc should conclude with the familiar conspiratorial fanfare: "There is good reason that this book has been out of print for

two generations." You might as well say that the Royal Ballet performs *Swan Lake* year after year only because it reinforces male domination and is thus useful to capitalism.

Ann Scott



NERVES by Blanche M Boyd

"I think you should stay out of Martha Eliot's problems until you find out what's wrong with your nerves, Aaron had said to Lena."

Lena, a suburban housewife, wonders if it's nerves that make her suddenly see how much her life is built on the lives of black people, if it's nerves that make her afraid sometimes of her own daughter, if it's nerves that draw her towards Martha, the woman who has scandalised the Country Club scene by leaving her family for a young medical student.

Her teenage daughter Diane, convulsed by conflicting feelings about her mother, her stepfather and her querulous Aunt Diddy, flails around trying to find a place in the world for herself. She roams the neighbourhood's empty lots and graveyards with her friend Brookie. She ponders nervously about the size of his 'thing' and gets stomach cramps; in one of her brainstorms she just happens to sweep him off a high gravestone, breaking his arm.

Martha decides that she wants to marry her young lover. He meditates and says no. Lena moves haltingly towards friendship with Martha... but the odds against the women in this book are too high. There's no way they can listen to these 'nerves'. Their feelings and aspirations erupt only to rebound on them, thrown back by the taut fabric of their lives, their concepts and the power of their men. A feminist language which might have helped make sense of their experience hasn't yet touched on their lives; they turn inward on themselves - Lena in fragmentation and collapse, Martha in drunkenness and suicide. One feels, though, that maybe Diane, young and resilient, will drag herself out of her obsessive toying with superstition and self-torture, and survive. *Nerves* is a book for all women whose parents and husbands ever labelled them 'highly strung'.

Alison Fell



A TRUE STORY OF A DRUNKEN MOTHER by Nancy Lee Hall

This "fictionalised autobiography" is written by a recovered alcoholic about her drinking past, a woman who, according to the blurb, "without a feminist press would never be heard, because she speaks outside the male literary tradition altogether".

A True Story of a Drunken Mother tells the story of an American woman born in 1923, brought up by grandparents, who escapes into a miserable marriage, and then runs off to war-time Cleveland. Seeking relief from her problems in drink, and pregnant by someone who has been killed, she marries for the second time and has another six children. She moves from one quonset house and naval base to another.

After a suicide attempt Nancy contacts Alcoholics Anonymous, and for nine months manages to stay away from drink, and her life improves dramatically. But one wet day - to relieve the tension of living with fractious children and a broken television, she decided to try a beer. In no time she is back on the merry-go-round, a prisoner of her compulsion again and her life disintegrating around her.

Finally, after a night spent with some Marines, whoring for drink, she wakes up to feel "an electric shock, and I had the strong feeling that I would never have to take another drink again". She phones AA once more; this time she stays sober.

The book ends abruptly some dozen pages later, when she stands up to her husband who, having taken to beating her up when drunk, makes to continue now she is sober. In a long, emotional diatribe she tells him about the role she has been forced to play and that she will play it no longer. She asks him to leave, and the book ends with the declaration "I was no longer a prisoner, I was free."

Other than this unexpected and unconvincing outburst there is nothing in this book which does not pander to "the male literary tradition". The woman comes over as victim, pitiable and pathetic, destroying herself in response to intolerable social pressures. The book, written in "the styleless style of the drug-store" is sensational and lurid, dwelling on the drama rather than the tedium of constant drunkenness.

Nancy Lee Hall was a victim - but of an insidious and often fatal disease. She is also a woman who has recovered from this disease. At the time of writing the book she had been sober 15 years. It is those 15 years I would like to know about, the years when she stopped being a victim, when she brought up her children alone and later with the help of women in the women's movement, years when she learnt to cope, sober, with problems she had once blotted out with drink and other drugs. Not such a dramatic, nor such a commercial story perhaps, but one which might really get outside conventional literary tradition.

Margaret Simpson



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THE BIRTH OF THE FIRST CHILD

towards an understanding of femininity
by Dana Breen
(Tavistock Publications, £3.50 paperback)

This book is about the emotional conflicts and ambivalent feelings women experience during pregnancy; and how different women adapt to the new demands of motherhood. It is based on a piece of academic research and is presented with all the necessary trimmings of graphs and statistics. But don't be put off by this if you want to find out more about the emotional and psychological effects of pregnancy. There are many comments made by the women who took part in the research which are both enlightening and reassuring to anyone feeling anxious or confused about her pregnancy and first child.

Dana Breen's method was to look at two groups of women from early pregnancy to the time of the subsequent birth. According to the results of projective tests and obstetric reports she categorised the women as "well-adjusted" or "ill-adjusted" (although she stresses that these categories refer to two connected extremes, and that adjustment means adjustment at a specific time in relation to a particular experience).

Her basic hypothesis is that a woman is "well-adjusted" if she can adapt her perception of herself and her intimate relationships to fit in with her new role as a mother. In order to do this successfully she must make a number of changes in her behaviour — changes which have been triggered off by the experience of pregnancy and first childbirth. These changes involve her identification with her own mother-image (this includes her relationship with her own mother at the time); her satisfaction in the mothering role; increased differentiation with her partner; an acceptance of pregnancy and an increased sense of femininity.

Dana Breen uses her research to reveal a radically new concept of femininity. She shows that the birth of the first child is a tremendously active event in a woman's psychological life. It emphasises her internal self, the functions of her special body organs; her "femaleness".

She points out that: "If activity is necessary in a woman for child-bearing, then it is absurd to call it (as Freud and others do) 'temporary masculinity' . . . this activity is an intimate part of femininity. Femininity is not composed of one attitude or emotion or self concept but can mean different things at different times in a woman's life or moments in her life." She goes on to say, "In order to understand femininity and the psychology of

women we must look at the positive aspects of what a woman is rather than at what she is not."

She suggests that femininity refers to the awareness, acceptance and valuing of the female body. This view is far removed from the traditional notion of the woman, based on Freudian theory, who, observing her own body, sees herself to be an "incomplete" male; and therefore inferior and passive. By underlining the profound and positive effects of pregnancy on the emotional and psychological development of a woman, Dana Breen is not subscribing to the popular myths that pregnancy and childbirth are the summit in every woman's life, and that a woman is only complete if she has these experiences. She does, however, emphatically refute the still commonly accepted idea that pregnancy is a passive state when women become placid and bovine, and are taken over by their bodies to the detriment of their mental and physical selves. Instead she shows that women who choose to go through pregnancy and childbirth, experience a particular kind of psychological change and growth.

Most general books and articles on pregnancy only concentrate on practical problems — like how many nappies to buy, or how best to prevent stretch marks. But Dana Breen has succeeded in writing an empirical study of what women feel about themselves and others close to them, when faced with pregnancy and birth, that is both stimulating and accessible. And she has used her study of these feelings and emotions to extend our understanding of femininity in relation to biology and the female body.

Sue Farrell

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WHAT EVERY WOMAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT VIBRATORS

As the first company to introduce vibrators into the U.K. and having sold some hundred of thousands, we feel that we know more about them and their use than most.

The most important thing to remember is, **that they do work** — providing the woman has no violent prejudice against the use of artificial sexual stimulation. Some women find the shape off-putting. The phallic symbolism, deliberately created by the makers to emphasize its sexual usage, gives them the impression that it is meant to be used as an artificial penis, and indeed it can and is so used. Some women, however, find the effect — when used in this way — to be more numbing than stimulating.

The vibrator is designed and is far more effective when used for clitoral stimulation and its undoubted value for this purpose has been well established by Masters and Johnson in their book "An Analysis of Human Sexual Response." In the book they describe how, using a similar device, they were able to bring to orgasm women who have never before reached a climax.

These were extreme cases obviously. Normally, the vibrator is used to provide extra stimulation during love making and is particularly useful where the woman's response tends to be slow. And, of course, it is just as often used purely for personal pleasure.

Finally a word about quality. There are many different makes on the market today, all of similar design, ranging in quality from very good to absolutely useless. We have been selling the same model for seven years and have enough confidence in it to offer you our special 'money refund' service if you are not satisfied.

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SPARE

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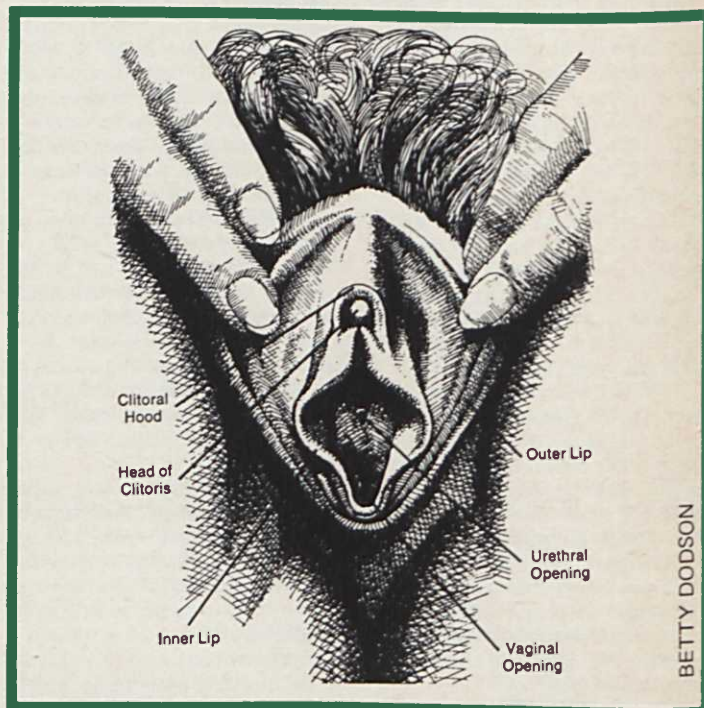
Many readers have asked us to publish more on the work of the pre-orgasmic women's groups described in 'The Moon Within Our Reach' in *Spare Rib* 42; in particular some practical information which may be useful to women who wish to teach themselves to have orgasms through masturbation. The notes and tips that follow are adapted from the material used in the groups: they are a very bare outline and in no way substitute for the experience of belonging to a group and doing this work with the help and support of other women. But the fact is that no such groups exist in this country at present. *Eleanor Stephens* is trying to coordinate a group in the London area so get in touch with her at *Spare Rib* if you are interested in joining a group. Also let us know of groups starting anywhere so that we may inform other women.

1 Developing the capacity to experience orgasm takes time and determination, and it is important to commit a regular amount of time to yourself to do this. This means taking time from other things – working, looking after the children, seeing friends – and you first need to accept that you deserve this time; that learning to explore your sexuality for yourself is at least as important as all the other things you take on during the day. So decide to give yourself an hour each day for a month during which you can relax and be undisturbed in a warm comfortable place.

2 If at all possible, it helps to discuss with a friend your attitudes towards sex. (If you are in a women's group this could be an evening's discussion topic.) These questions may help you get started: What were your parents' attitudes towards sex? How did they communicate this to you? How did you feel about sex as a child – games with brothers and sisters? Onset of puberty – who first told you about this, how did you feel? First time you tried using tampons? Fears about touching 'that' part of you? Did you masturbate as a child, did you have orgasms? Your first sexual experiences, petting, 'losing virginity', feelings of guilt, disappointment, pleasure? Memorable sexual incidents since then? How do you feel about your body now – breasts, genitals, how your skin feels, smells? In particular notice not merely *what* you feel but where it comes from, eg: thinking your breasts are too small because you were brought up with 1950s Monroe model, feeling too fat because your mother was always dieting etc. etc.

3 **Your first assignment:** Before you can begin to work with the specific sexual feelings which lead to orgasm, you must take time to get to know your body and feel good about it. You can't make love to someone that you don't know or like. Lock your door and undress slowly in front of your mirror. Look at your body from different angles, standing, kneeling, moving in different ways, leg apart. What aspects do you like, what don't you like, and why not? Why are you so critical of that feature – are you as critical of other people? Many women find that their negative feelings are based on their images of what they look like, rather than what they actually see in the mirror. Or on the idealised stereotypes we've been brought up to accept.

After looking at yourself for at least ten minutes, start exploring your body with your hands. (Sometimes it helps to play music – and warm your hands first!) Compare different textures of skin in different places; find the roughest and the smoothest spots, the hardest and the softest. Do not concentrate on sexual areas but don't ignore them altogether. Try massaging powder or oil (baby lotion is good) into your



skin, do it slowly enjoying how it feels. Try to get to know all part of your body and to accept the way you are now, not worry about how you think you should be.

4 When you feel comfortable with the above procedure, go on to the next step of becoming familiar with your genital area. Again, take your time in a private room with a hand mirror and a strong light source. At the same time, or beforehand, do some studying on the anatomy and physiology of female sexuality so that you know exactly what you are looking at. (Chapter 2 in *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is excellent.) It is worth learning some of the medical terminology as this helps demystify things when you go for a gynae. exam. There isn't space to describe this here but it is worth remembering one thing: while men's and women's sexual organs may seem very different, they in fact develop from the same embryonic tissue and have analogous structure and functions. (The ovaries with the testes, the labia majora with the scrotum, and the clitoris with the penis.)

Now take your mirror and light and examine your genitals carefully. Our illustration shows one set of organs, but it may look nothing like yours, just as a drawing of a face may not resemble your face. Each one of us has a genital configuration which is uniquely ours. Some women have large puffy outer lips, some are small and thin. The size of the clitoris can vary from ¼ to 1 inch, and the hood over it can vary in size and thickness. None of these variations seem to affect sexual functioning just as having large eyes doesn't affect how well you can see. To become familiar with your genitals, try to draw a sketch of them – if you are working in a group or with a friend you can compare pictures. Do not be afraid of touching these parts with clean hands. The inside of the vagina is cleaner than the inside of your mouth, and the normal secretions are not unpleasant to smell or taste. Try to become as familiar as you can with your genitals and to overcome whatever resistance and nervousness you may experience by trying to understand where it comes from; often mostly ignorance. Notice changes in sensitivity to touch – the highest density of nerve endings is in the clitoris, and while women vary in the sexual sensitivity of the vagina, the nerve endings are concentrated around the opening.

PARTS

5

When you have spent at least two one-hour sessions on the 'self exploring' exercises above, begin experimenting with direct clitoral stimulation which will eventually lead to orgasm. Orgasm is a physiological reflex like a sneeze which occurs in response to sufficient stimulation. It is a total bodily response and in particular involves rhythmic contractions of the vagina. The subjective experience of orgasm is different for each individual. Do not expect to reach orgasm in the first few sessions, and promise yourself

lots of time and practice. Your aim is to find out what kind of stimulation suits you and to concentrate on maximising whatever sexual feelings you do feel, however small these may be at first. Try not to monitor and measure your feelings, and don't rush things. You are trying to let your body remake connections which have been disconnected for a long time, so give yourself every chance to do this.

Experiment with different kinds of pressure on and around the clitoris, and use some oil, saliva or vaginal lubrication to keep your fingers moist. Try moving one or two fingers from side to side across the ridge of the clitoris, then try up-and-down and circular movements. Do not be afraid of pressing quite hard, especially on the shaft (the head of the clitoris may be too sensitive for direct pressure). When you find a place that is sensitive, try various rhythmic movements at different speeds. Some women find it helpful to build up general muscle tension in their thighs and pelvis by lifting their pelvis up and pressing down with their feet, or bracing against the end of the bed. If you feel muscle tension in your thighs or stomach, don't resist it or try to relax; it is part of the natural build up of tension which results in orgasm. You may find it helpful to take deep breaths at first and then hold your breath, or some women prefer to take short panting breaths. Don't ignore the rest of your body; stroking your breasts or thighs may increase your responsiveness, and some women like to have something in their vaginas while they stimulate their clitoris.

Obviously, your mental attitude is crucial to all this, so try to enjoy yourself and let your mind focus freely on the sensual feelings, rather than worrying about what you are going to have for supper. A woman I know surprised herself by having her first orgasm after reading some pornography — this had been suggested to her, and she was very cynical about trying it. Many women consciously use fantasies to help increase their excitement; sometimes alcohol or marijuana is useful for slowing your thoughts down and allowing you to relax — but not so much that you fall asleep! Having an orgasm demands a lot of energy and concentration so don't do your homework last thing at night when you are exhausted.

You may need up to an hour of stimulation, or more, to have an orgasm the first time, but you'll find it happens more quickly when you become more familiar with the experience and the kind of stimulation you need. If your hand and fingers get tired, try swapping hands or take a short break and then continue. But you do need some rhythmic continuity to carry your body up from the 'excitement' phase, to the 'plateau' phase to orgasm. For a detailed account of these stages, see Masters and Johnson's *Human Sexual Response*, (Churchill, 1966). Try to be patient and continue even if you feel like giving up — all new skills need practice and this takes time.

6

An important characteristic of the vagina is the muscle that surrounds the opening and covers the pelvic floor, called the pubococcygeal (PC) muscle. It is one of the muscles that contracts strongly during orgasm and it has been found that improving the tone of this muscle much increases sensitivity in the whole area. These exercises were developed by Dr Arnold Kegel and are referred to as Kegels. They are also taught in many natural childbirth classes. Here is one version: To find the PC muscle deliberately

stop your flow of urine while you are peeing. Do this a few times so

you become familiar with the PC muscle you use. Then lie down and insert your finger in the opening to the vagina and see if you can feel the contraction around your finger when you contract that muscle. After practising the Kegels for a few weeks check to see if you notice a difference in the strength of the contraction around your finger.

Squeeze the PC muscle for three seconds, then relax it. If this is hard to do, start with one second and work up to three in a few days. Try to do ten 3-second squeezes at three different times during the day. Since no-one can see that you're doing it, this can be done while answering the phone or waiting at the bus stop. You may find that the muscles around your anus move too, but if your thighs or stomach muscles are moving, you've probably got the wrong muscle. When you are adept at this after a few days, add a 'flutter' exercise, contracting and relaxing the PC as quickly as you can ten times. Try to make these two exercises a habit, like brushing your teeth, for at least a month. By then the muscle should have developed good tone and this won't disappear if you reduce the number of times you practice.

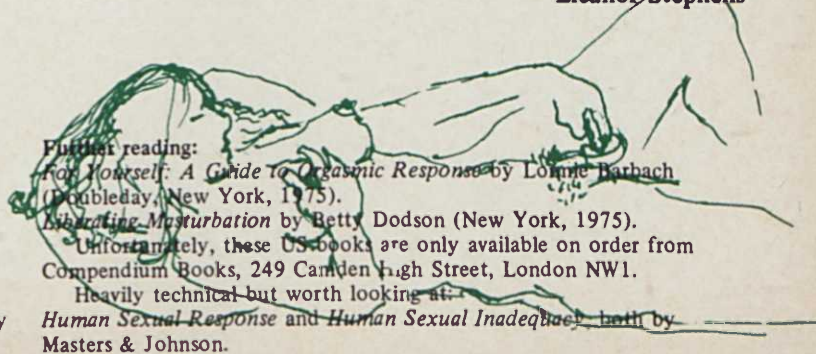
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If you have practised these methods on at least half a dozen occasions and feel you are getting nowhere, it is certainly worth trying some non-manual forms of stimulation. Directing a stream of water on and around the clitoral area brings many women to orgasm. (Children often discover this playing in the bath!) and often being in the bath will help you to relax and enjoy yourself more. Many women find that an electric vibrator is an invaluable aid to having orgasms and they go on to integrate its use in making love with a

partner. NB Don't try electric vibrators and water simultaneously! Sold as massagers, the ones with the small round attachments are better than the phallic shapes. If the sensation is too strong, use a towel or some clothes between your body and the vibrator. (Electric toothbrushes are also used for this purpose.) The sensations you experience may feel too strong and overwhelming at first and you may find yourself resisting them, but it is worth taking time to get used to this as the chances of reaching orgasm with a vibrator are very high indeed. When you are familiar with the experience of an orgasm, return to manual stimulation. While it may take much longer it will be easier now that your body knows what the response is. Alternatively, begin with manual stimulation and then change to a vibrator or water stream. Remember that the whole point of this homework is to experiment with different kinds of sensations and for you to become familiar and at home with your body and your new sexual feelings.

It is very natural to feel apprehensive and scared of these feelings at first because they are new and not altogether under your control. (For many women, learning to allow themselves to give up this control is the most important step to having orgasms.) This is why it is important to have plenty of time to move along as slowly as you wish; like all feelings, sexual sensations come and go and if you feel that everything has turned off during one session, you know that you will be able to continue tomorrow. This commitment of time and determination mentioned at the beginning is crucial to success in reaching the goal. □

Eleanor Stephens



Further reading:
For Yourself: A Guide to Orgasmic Response by Linnie Barbach (Doubleday, New York, 1975).

Experiencing Masturbation by Betty Dodson (New York, 1975).

Unfortunately, these US books are only available on order from Compendium Books, 249 Camden High Street, London NW1.

Heavily technical but worth looking at: *Human Sexual Response* and *Human Sexual Inadequacy*, both by Masters & Johnson.

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